This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

A 398271

828
R598

THE WORKS

OF

MISS THACKERAY

THE WORKS

OF

Ritchie

MISS THACKERAY

111743

VOLUME V.

BLUEBEARD'S KEYS

AND OTHER STORIES

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1876

[*All rights reserved*]

BLUEBEARD'S KEYS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MISS THACKERAY

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1876

[*All rights reserved*]

BLUEBEARD'S KEYS

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

MISS THACKERAY

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1876

[*All rights reserved*]

A DEDICATION

TO THE

WRITERS OF FAIRY-TALE HEXAMETERS

F. W. C., H. T.
J. R. S. AND R. T. R.

THE PROOFS of my story-book are piled upon the table by the open windows: there are records of many sunshines in these little histories, but of none more sweet than this present grace of being and existence, high perched on our fragrant height. Rose-hedges grow along our terrace, casting wild scent and fantastic branches upon the blue of the great waters, the sunshine seems to stir the uprising moors to mystic life, and a mighty measure is sounding from the beach below. In the light and the fragrance and sweetness it seems almost a dream to incredulous eyes, when lo! a message comes from that mystic world; a robin flies into the room and perches on the table with a reassuring flutter, and all seems real once more.

Dedication.

It is time I leave my proofs and my fairy-follies and despatch them to the printer in London, far away; these pages in my own, and in the familiar handwritings, that have brought me (not without some protest) the stories as I asked for them, told once more, in a certain cadence.

The original tunes had seemed to me lost somehow, in my experiments and variations, and these kind musicians and another, not refusing to please me, have played them once more to the measure I asked for.

To friend H. T. and to kinsman R. I must write my thankyou here; to F. I can say it as he stands smoking his pipe upon the terrace-walk.

LYNTON, NORTH DEVON
August 6, 1874.

CONTENTS.

BLUEBEARD'S KEYS.

PART I.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Fanny's Work-Basket	3
II.	The Terrace opposite the Church	12
III.	Under the Dais	22
IV.	A Carriage; a Marquis	32
V.	A Trousseau	40
VI.	The Secret	51
VII.	Bluebeard's Keys	58

PART II.

VIII.	Mrs. de Travers' Dreams	73
IX.	Mrs. de Travers Awake	82
X.	A Roman Party	88
XI.	Fanny and Barbi	98
XII.	The Capuchins' Mass	108

RIQUET A LA HOUPPE.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	True Love	121
II.	Dorlicote	125
III.	Colonel King's Two Daughters	130
IV.	Dinner	137
V.	Tea-Time	143
VI.	Some Passages from Sophy's Correspondence	148
VII.	More Correspondence	155
VIII.	In The Balcony	160
IX.	Through the Village	167
X.	Sylie Alone in the Forest	173
XI.	An Umbrella	180
XII.	Miss Williamson tries Her Hand at Description	185
XIII.	Old Christine's Oracle	191

JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK.

I.	Jack's Father	203
II.	Jack's Mother	209
III.	The Cow	215
IV.	The Ogre's Harp	223
V.	Jack meets a Fairy Godmother	229
VI.	Beans and Talk	235

CHAPTER PAGE

VII. Widow Barnes' Hen is Scared 245

VIII. In the Ogre's Castle 259

IX. The Bean-Stalk up which Jack tried to Climb 264

X. The Arid Country towards which Jack is climbing 268

XI. Jack comes to the Ogre's Mansion . . . 274

XII. Jack carries off the Hen with the Golden Eggs 282

XIII. Jack hears the Strain of the Harp Music 289

XIV. The Bean-Stalk 296

XV. Jack starts on His Second Journey to the Ogre's Castle 303

XVI. Jack secures the Money-Bags 307

XVII. Jack steals the Golden Harp 312

XVIII. Jack brings Home the Golden Harp and cuts the Bean-Stalk 318

THE WHITE CAT.

I. A Friend 325

II. Fairy Latouche enchants the Castle and the Poor Little White Cat 333

III. The Old King and His Three Sons . . 341

IV. The Youngest starts on His Travels in Search of a Dog, Fine Linen, and a Fair Bride . 350

CHAPTER PAGE

V. The Grand Entertainment to which the Prince accompanies the White Cat 362

VI. The Prince stays on at the White Cat's Castle 375

VII. The Prince prepares to Take Leave . . 386

VIII. The Prince carries off the French Poodle . 395

IX. The Prince at His Father's Court . . 400

X. The Prince cuts off the White Cat's Head and throws it into the Fire 406

BLUEBEARD'S KEYS.

ARGUMENT.

BLUEBEARD spake to his wife in tones of tender affection :
'Barbara, take these keys : thine husband goes on a journey,
'Such a necessity drives me to go ; unwilling I leave thee ;
'Be thou keeper of all while Bluebeard mourns in his absence :
'All these household keys, one golden—key of a chamber
'Into the which thou mayst not look, since evil awaits her,
'Curious, who shall look : so Barbara leave it unopened.'
Bluebeard parted.—At once her friends rushed all thro' the castle,
Into the chambers peered, tossed shawls and laces about them,
Saw great piles of gold, gold suits of wonderful armour,
Helmets, velvets, silks, gems, bracelets, necklaces, ermine,
Gaudy brocades, and silver spears, and gorgeous hauberks
Meanwhile that gold key grew warm in her ivory fingers ;
Ah, what vast ill on earth is caused by curious wifehood !
Quickly she leapt as a hunted deer through gallery windings
Straight to the chamber door : unlocked it, saw thro' the doorway
Nine fair wives in a heap of helpless de-capitation.
(These had Bluebeard slain for spying into the chamber.)
Seized with affright she shrieked, and falling fainted in horror :
Far from her hand in among those headless, beautiful Houris
Glided, alas ! the glitt'ring key : but Barbara bending
Picked it in anguish up : ran forth and carefully wiped it,
Stained as it was with a mark of murder, a horrible gore-spot ;
Gore unwipeable, gore unwashable, not to be cleansèd.
Hearken ! a noise in the hall, the strong portcullis ascending !
Bluebeard strode to his bride, and kissed his Barbara fiercely,
Thundering, 'Where's my key ?' but waiting long for an answer,
His blue beard grew dark and writhed in an indigo blackness ;
Barbara turned very pale, and all red again in an instant,
Handed him his strange key. He roaring, 'Here is a gore-spot,
'Gore unwipeable, gore unwashable, not to be cleansèd,
'Gore of my late wives' hearts : die thou too, Barbara—join them,'
Straight strode out for a sword. She called upon Anna her sister,
'Anna, my sister, go up to the tower, and scream for assistance :'
'Come brothers, oh, come quick, bring swords and smite and avenge us !'
Anna returned with streaming eyes and woefully sighing,
'Fie upon all that long, bare highway, no man approaches !'
So they wept and knelt and prayed for a speedy deliv'rance :
Back to the tower once more clomb Anna, and screamed in a transport,
'Sister, I hear from afar rapid hoofs as of horsemen approaching.'
'Come brother Osman, come brother Alee, come to the rescue.'
All in a wink those two, like wild cats, sprang thro' the casement,
Caught Bluebeard by the beard, and dyed it a dolorous crimson,
Making his head two halves. Then . . . Barbara dropped 'em a curtsey,
Clapped her white little hands with a laugh, and whirled pirouetting.—
Thus doth a vengeful Fate o'ertake all human oppressors.

CHAPTER I.

FANNY'S WORK-BASKET.

OLD KEYS have always had a strange interest for me. There are many places where they may be found, hidden away, or openly put up for sale. They are of every size and substance. There are dream keys and real ones. We have most of us crossed the shadow of the great keys of St. Peter's. We have heard of the key of the street, a dismal possession. Some of us have held the key of the mystery that puzzled us so long. There is the key of a heart's secret, too (for hearts come into the world, some locked, some flapping wide; and day by day the keys are forged that are to open them, or close them up for ever); and the key of the cupboard, where the skeleton is hidden —and, besides all these ghost keys, there are the real keys in the iron, and if they belong to dreamland, it is by association only. You may see them rusting in any old second-hand dealer's shop among cracked china and worm-eaten furniture, and faded stuff and torn lace. You may buy them for a few pence to dream over, to jingle, to melt away: to do anything with but to lock and unlock

the doors and caskets to which they once belonged. Here is the key of the old house that was burnt down long ago, and the key of the spinet, where such sweet music lived and streamed out at the touch of the ladies' white fingers. The music is circling still in distant realms, philosophers tell us; the lady is dead; the spinet, too, has vanished, but here is the key! It means nothing now—no more does the key of the casket where the letters used to be locked away, that were afterwards published for a certain sum of money; or the key of the empty cellar where the good wine was once kept, or the ring of old keys in a heap in a work-basket once. . . . .

Some one had picked them up and put them away there. These happened to be the keys of a home once warm with firelight and sunlight and loving looks. The sun still shone upon the walls, the fires still burnt upon the hearth, but the home was cold, for all the hot summer's sun, and the love seemed turned to dry tears and bitter salt. The keys lie in the work-basket, covered over with many shreds of tangled silk, with half-finished tattings and trimmings, with half-strung beads, scraps of rhyme jotted down on stray fly-leaves, or card-bobbins; a half-finished fillet of a silken purse; a Roman medal and a ribbon; a flower stitched on a great big bit of canvas, large enough for a whole parterre of flowers; some rosewater in an eastern bottle; some charms; and underneath everything the keys in a bunch. Did the owner lose them among the anemonies

of the Borghese gardens? Did not the lady of the work-basket spy them shining in the grass, and bring them safe away to the silken nest where they have been lying for many a day? Sometimes two soft brown hands come feeling at the half-open basket, pulling out long threads of coloured silk from the tangle: they are Fanny Travers' curious little hands, with gentle quick fingers. The work-basket stands in a recess, where all day long Fanny Travers' bird has been chirping, piping, whistling in a cage, hanging high up above the great city, from a window cut deep in the thickness of the palace wall.

The red frill of an old damask curtain catches the light, the shutters are closed, in bars of grey and gloom against the outside burning sun. In the window a couple of plants are growing: they stand on the stone ledge, dark against the chequered light and shade. A worn marble step leads up into the recess, where old Olympia has put ready a bit of carpet and two straw chairs for Fanny and her sister, who sometimes come and sit there, Roman fashion, resting their arms on the stone ledge, in the cool of the evening, looking out across tiles and countless casements and grey house-tops; across walled gardens and stone-yards, beyond the spires and domes of the great city to the great dome of all, that rises like a cloud against the Campagna and the distant hills: the flowing plash of a fountain sounds from below, so does the placid chip of the stone-workers under their trellis of vine, and a drone

of church-bells from the distant outer world, bells that jangle like those Irish Sunday bells that Fanny and her sister can remember when they were little girls at home at Barrowbank, near Ballymoran Green. Now they are grown up young ladies, while these Italian chimes come echoing along the sunny sloping streets and broad places and stone-yards and garden-walls that lead to the old palace on the hill. Their window is high up in the palace; they live with their mother and old Olympia in a small side wing, to which they climb by a marble staircase leading from the great landing. Sometimes Fanny and her sister, seeing the doors ajar down below, peep in at a lofty marble hall where veiled statues seem to keep watch; everything is cool and dark and silent, though all day long the burning sun has been beating outside against the marble rocks of the old palace.

Fanny and her sister sit in a vaulted room with windows towards the front—windows that you could scarcely distinguish from the piazza, so hidden are they among the marble wreaths and columns which ornament the old palace, if it were not for the birdcage and for Anne's tall lily-pots flowering in the sun; the two girls' heads are bending over their work. They are busy with harmless magic, weaving themselves into elegant young ladies out of muslin shreds and scraps and frills. The little impetuous Fanny cuts and snips and runs along the endless breadths of tarlatan; Anne stitches on more demurely. The elegant young

ladies who will come floating into the ball-room in their mother's train that evening are sitting at work in little shabby white morning-gowns. Their evening's magnificence is concocted of very simple materials—muslins washed and ironed by their own hands, ribbons turned and re-turned. Once, poor Anne, having nothing else at hand, trimmed her old dress with bunches of parsley. . . .

Anne Travers was a sweet young creature. Fanny was very pretty, but not to compare to her; she was smaller, darker, more marked in feature: she looked like a bad photograph of her beautiful elder sister.

Nature is very perverse. She will give to one sister one hair's breadth more nose, that makes all the difference, one inch more height, one semitone more voice, one grain more colouring. Here was Anne, with beautiful dark eyes and beautiful black hair, lovely smiles, picturesque frowns, smooth gliding movements, and a voice that haunted you long after it had ceased to utter; and there was Fanny, stitching away on the marble step, surrounded by white scraps, and with black hair on end, and smaller eyes, shorter limbs, paler cheeks. She was nothing particular, most people said; not beloved, like Anne; she did not hope for much to brighten her toilsome life; she despaired and lost her temper at times; and yet there was a spirit and pathos of impetuosity about the little woman, that, so one person once said, outweighed all the suave charm of her sister's grace. Every one loved Anne, she was so

soft, so easily pleased, and so sure of pleasing. The life she led was not a wholesome one, but it did not spoil her. The twopenny cares that brought the purple to her mother's hair, and the sulky frown to Fanny's brow, only softened Anne's eyes to a gentle melancholy.

Poor little Fanny! how she hated the stealings and scrapings of fashionable life that fell to their share—the lifts in other people's carriages, the contrivances and mortifications. 'Mamma, what *is* the good of it all?' she would say. 'Let us go and live in a cottage, and Anne shall stand by the fountain and sell roses and violets.'

Mrs. de Travers had not much humour for an Irishwoman.

'No children of mine, with my consent, shall ever give up appearances,' she said, testily. 'Is this the language, Fanny, you use after the many many sacrifices I have made? If Lord Tortillion had behaved as common decency might have suggested, we should have been spared all this. But his conduct shall make no difference in ours; and we will do our duty in our state of life.'

Lord Tortillion was Fanny and Anne's grandfather, a stern Orangeman, who happening to hear of his son's marriage and conversion to Catholicism immediately cut off the young man's allowance. When Mr. de Travers died, he left his widow and daughters the price of his commission and an insurance on his life, which, with a small inheritance of Anne's, gave them something to live upon.

The widow struggled valiantly on this slender raft to keep up her head in the fashionable whirlpool, to which she had been promoted by marriage. She acted honestly according to her lights. She thought it was her duty for her children's sake, and she worked away without ever asking herself to what it all tended.

People's duties are among the most curious things belonging to them. The South Kensington Museum might exhibit a collection of them. They are all-important to each of us, though others would be puzzled enough to say what they mean, or what good they are to anyone else. There might be glass cases with catalogued specimens of disciplines, of hair-shirts, and boiled fish, for some; then for others a sort of social Jacob's ladder, with one foot on earth and the other in Belgrave Square, to be clambered only by much pains, by vigils, by mortifications, by strainings and clutchings, and presence of mind. Some people feel that a good dinner is their solemn vocation; others try for poor soup, cheap flannel, and parochial importance; some feel that theirs is a mission to preach disagreeable truths; while others have a vocation for agreeable quibbles; there are also divisions, and sermons, and letters, and protests; some of us wish to improve ourselves, others prefer improving their neighbours. Mrs. de Travers had no particular ambition for herself, poor soul! She was a lazy woman, and would have contentedly dozed away the quiet evenings by the smouldering log, but a demon of duty

came flitting up the palace stairs. 'Get up,' it whispered to her, 'get up, put on your wedding-garment' (it was a shabby old purple dyed-satin that had once been bought in hopes of an invitation to Tourniquet Castle); 'never mind the draught, never mind the pain in your shoulder,' says duty, 'send old Olympia for a hack-cab, shiver down the long marble flight and be off, or Lady Castleairs won't ask you again.' Can one blame the poor shivering martyr as she enters Lady Castleairs' drawing-room, followed by her two votive maidens? Anne took things placidly, accepted kindness and patronage with a certain sweet dignity that held its own; but poor little Fanny chafed and fumed and frowned at the contrivances and scrapings and disputings of their makeshift existence. How she longed sometimes to forget the price of earth, air, fire, and water, of fish, flesh, and fowl. She would have liked silver pieces to give to the pretty little black-pated children who come running and dancing along the sunny streets, and peeping out of darkened doorways. She would have liked to buy the great bunches of roses that the girl with the sweet beseeching eyes would hold up to her by the fountain in the street below: great pale pink heads and white sprays flowering; and golden and yellow buds among leaves of darkest emerald, with purple and shining stems. But it was no use wishing; even roses mean money: it is only thistles and briers that we may gather for nothing.

So Fanny and Anne stitch on in the darkened room,

while Olympia glides about in the passage outside, and Mrs. de Travers dozes in a birdcage-like little boudoir opening out of the sitting-room, among many quaint splendours fading away, mirrors with dim garlands painted on their surfaces, reflecting poor Mrs. de Travers' nodding head, she seems all crowned with roses and emblems of delight; also lyre-backed chairs, little miniatures hanging to faded ribbons, and hooks in the trellis wall, and an old tapestry carpet with Rebecca at the well and brown straggling camels coming up to drink. All is quite hot and silent: Mrs. de Travers snores loudly.

'Come, Nancy,' says Fanny, in the outer room, 'let us go for a turn in the garden.'

'My head aches,' says Anne; 'I should like it. I suppose there will be time to finish our work.'

'Everything is so tiresome,' says Fanny, impetuously, 'and I hate Lady Castleairs. O dear, how I wish,—I wish I was enormously rich.'

the least know what he meant by a *sgabello*. It was a low wooden bench, which the under-gardener placed under the Spanish chestnut tree at the end of the avenue, just opposite the little rocky fountain. An Apollo stood over the fountain, with one arm outstretched against the blue waterfalls; green, close-creeping wreaths fell over the rocks; also many violets and ferns sprouting spring-like, and the iris stems of a few faint yellow flowers starting from the side of an old stone, and then a little wind stirs the many branches. . . .

'This is nicer than that endless tucking,' says Fanny. 'I wish one's dresses grew like leaves and flowers.'

'But what should we wear in winter?' says Anne, looking about. 'Hush! what is that?'

'That' was a strange soft commotion in the air—a flapping, crooning murmur, and two doves, flying white through the sunshine, alighted by the rocky fountain, and began to drink. But Fanny jumped up to admire, and though she was no very terrible personage, the doves flew away.

'Silly creatures!' says Fanny, throwing a chestnut-leaf after them.

Then she started off, and went to walk on the terrace, from whence she could see the people in the street.

Anne followed slowly. How sweet and bright the fountain flowed! How quietly the shadows shook in time to the triumphal burst of spring light. Over the wall of

the garden she caught sight of an ancient church front; rows of oleanders stood upon the terrace; and from all the bushes and branches came a sweet summer whistle of birds, and the pleasant dream and fresh perfume of branches swaying in the soft wind.

Also along the terrace a colony of gods had assembled in a stony Olympus: Venus, and Ceres, and Mercury, and Theseus, the mighty hunter—ancient deities whose perennial youth had not saved them from decay. Their fair limbs were falling off, mouldy stains were creeping along the folds and emblems and torches. Theseus's lion's skin was crumbling away. . . .

'How horrid it must be to die young!' said Fanny, stopping for an instant to look at fair Ceres, one of whose hands had fallen off, whose nose was gone, whose bountiful cornucopia was broken in the middle, scattering plaster flowers and morsels on the ground. 'I wonder what Angelo meant by what he said about the Marchioness,' said Fanny.

'I never listen to him,' said Anne, walking on with a light step to a great pink stem studded with a close crop of flowers.

Some painter might have made a pretty picture of the girl bending in her white dress to admire the flower as it grew at the crumbling feet of the goddess of the forsaken altars.

Meanwhile, Fanny had sat down on the ledge of the

low wall, and was peeping with her bright open eyes into the street below. The flower-girl was at her place by the fountain; the old women were at their doors; the great porches of the opposite church were thrown wide open at the close of some religious ceremony: there was a vague cloud of incense issuing with the people, who were coming from behind the heavy curtains: some monks, some Italian peasants, a soldier or two, and some of those Brothers of Pietà who follow the funerals and pray for the souls of the dead. Six of them came out of the church, following each other two by two, with long blue silk masks veiling their faces, as they walked away down the street; but a seventh, who seemed waiting for somebody or something, stood upon the step of the church, looking up and down the street.

'Fanny,' cried Anne, who had been exploring the end of the terrace, 'here is a staircase up into the house.'

Fanny did not answer.

When Anne rejoined her sister, she found her sitting motionless on the stone wall just where she had left her, looking at something across the road.

'What is it? What are you waiting for?' cried Anne. 'Come away, Fanny. How that horrible figure stares at us.'

As she spoke, a monk came out of the church, and laid one hand on the shoulder of this blue-bearded figure (for the long pointed blue mask looked like nothing else).

The man started, and withdrew his burning eyes, which had been fixed on Fanny, and the two walked away together down the sloping street. No one, except the sisters, looked after the strange-looking pair: such a sight was common enough in Rome. The monk's brown skirts flapped against his heels; the brother walked with long straight strides. He wore spurs beneath his black robe.

Fanny was quite pale. 'Oh, Anne! I was too frightened to move,' said she. 'What is the little staircase? How horrid those people look.'

The little staircase disappeared into the wall which abutted at the end of the terrace; there was a small door, which had always been closed hitherto, leading to it. Halfway up a small window stood open, with a balcony (iron-fenced, with an iron coronet woven into the railing). It was just large enough for one person to stand. This person was old Angelo, waiting for them with his keys and a duster under his arm.

'This leads into the grand apartment,' he said. 'You may come if you like. I am going to see that all is in order for the coming of the Marquis. In the Marchioness's time it was full of company,' he explained as he unlocked the heavy doors. 'Now there are only the spiders and mice that we chase away.'

Fanny and her sister liked nothing better than being allowed to go over the great rooms. They gladly ac-

cepted Angelo's offer; even though the elegant young ladies should have to appear mulcted of their proper number of flounces that evening. They sprang up the narrow stairs two and three at a time, and came at once into a great bedroom, furnished with sumptuous blue satin hangings, with splendid laces covering the bed and the dressing-table, with beautiful china upon the mantel-shelf—all silent, abandoned, magnificent. The toilet-glass was wreathed with lace, the pincushion must have cost as much as Fanny's whole year's allowance. This room was more newly furnished than the rest of the suite, and yet it was more melancholy and deserted-looking than any other. Angelo took off his cap when he told them the Marchioness had died there.

'In that splendid bed?' said Fanny, thoughtfully.

'Not in the bed,' said Angelo, hurrying on to the next apartment.

The girls followed. Fanny's high heels echoed as they patted along the marble floor.

'Yes, Anne, I should like to be enormously rich. Oh! how I like satin and velvet!' And she sank into a great yellow satin chair.

'Ché! ché!' cries old Angelo; 'not on the best chairs. Farther on the young ladies shall rest.'

Farther on were great rooms with closed windows, and shutters within shutters. Fanny flew along the marble floor, tapping from room to room. Anne followed. The

girls soon left old Angelo and his duster behind. He could hear their voices exclaiming as they travelled to the end of the long suite. Great vases stood on the mosaic tables: faded hangings, with scripture subjects, waved from the panels. They passed room after room, and they came at last to one lofty hall, bigger than any they had passed through. It was unfurnished, but straight stone seats ran all round the wall, and at one end uprose a shadowy throne, raised beneath a daïs, where great plumes and a coat-of-arms were waving. Although the glories of the house of Barbi had passed from the family to which they once belonged, the insignia of their bygone dignities still faded there in all solemnity.

Some ten years before, the palace and the estates near Rome and the title had passed to a distant cousin of the grand old family, a foreigner, so people said, in humble circumstances. He had married soon after he inherited the property, but his married life had been but short, and since his wife's death he had not been seen in Rome. She was Sibilla, of the great Mangiascudi family, and it was said the Marquis bought her of her brothers. This was old Angelo's story; but he was always winking and shaking his head.

Fanny did not trouble herself about bygone or present Barbis, although they had numbered cardinals and ambassadors among their members. She was sliding and dancing along the polished floor, in and out among the

many tables. She was less even-tempered than her sister, and she would spring from all the depths to all the heights of excitement in a few minutes. The great audience-hall opened into another vista of rooms, through which the girls turned back. They passed old windows, cabinets, and picture-frames, the 'English boudoir' crammed with patchwork cushions and cheap gimcracks, with a priceless plaid paper-knife lying on a cushion beneath a glass. Then came more Italy; bare and stately, dim and grandiose. The two girls ran on, sometimes stopping short, sometimes hurrying along. At the end of all things was a little yellow room, with a vaulted ceiling, where some Cupids were flitting round an old crystal chandelier, fluttering, head downwards, in a white stucco cloud. Old Angelo had unfastened the closed shutters—for the sun at midday had passed beyond the corner of the palace—and the tall window looked out in shade upon a faint burning city, that flashed into dazzling misty distance. Some dead flowers were standing on the little stone balcony. The adventurous Fanny, peeping out, declared that she could not only see St. Peter's, but her own bird-cage and their old red curtains overhead.

'We ought to go back and finish our flounces,' said Anne, remembering the unfinished frills heaped up on the work-table in the window.

'Horrid things! Anne, how can you always talk about work just when we are most happy!' said Fanny,

stamping. 'We haven't half seen the things. Look at that curious old oak chest.'

There were many objects displayed upon the tables and cabinets of this little room, and Fanny's frills would never have been hemmed if she had waited to examine them all. The oak chest stood upon a carved stand, with handles worked into some fanciful representation of hearts entwined.

On the panel above hung a picture, that took the girl's fancy. It was the head of a peasant woman, painted by some great modern artist. It seemed taken in imitation of a celebrated head in the public galleries below, that people came from far and near to see. A beautiful woman, with dark imploring eyes, with a tremulous mouth that seemed ready to speak. In her hair were massive silver pins. Round her neck she wore the heavy coral necklace of the Italian peasants, with the addition of a crystal heart. The beautiful eyes were pitiful, but very sad. While Fanny stood absorbed, old Angelo appeared at a little door which led back into the blue bedroom—for they had come round the whole suite of rooms, and reached the place from whence they started.

'Come,' said Angelo, 'I have prepared the apartments for the Marquis. I shall let you young ladies out the other way.'

'We could go back by the garden,' said Fanny.

'I have locked the garden door,' said Angelo. 'The Marquis would be very angry if he chanced to see us there. He ordered it to be closed after the Lady Marchioness died.'

'Angelo, is this the Marchioness?' said Fanny, pointing to the picture.

'No,' said Angelo, gravely. 'No one knows who it is. The Marquis bought the picture of Don Federigo, the great painter, who had taken her as she sat at the fountain. There was no such model in Rome. Poor little one! she came to a sad end: she fell into the river. Don Federigo and the Marquis would have saved her, but it was too late. Hé, some people say he has the evil eye, our Marquis! Come, come!'

Old Angelo, who had a way of suddenly losing his temper, stumped off; the girls followed, then went back to have another look at the picture.

'What is that noise? He will lock us in,' said Anne, suddenly setting off running.

Fanny lingered one instant: as she looked, the pictured face seemed to change, the eyes to flash resentfully. It was a fancy, but it frightened her to be alone, and she, too, ran away.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER THE DAÏS.

ALL the rooms flew past again in inverse order. The girls hurried on, quickening their steps, but they took the wrong way once, and had to come back, baffled by a locked door. There are sometimes Pompeian figures painted on the walls of old Italian tombs—figures with garments flying, holding wheels and caskets in their hands, or simply rushing by with veils floating on the wind. The two sisters were not unlike these dancing nymphs, as they hurried in pursuit of the old custodian. Fanny had forgotten her fears, and Anne's spirits were rising high as she darted through the door leading into the enormous sala into which both the long galleries opened, and where the followers of princes and ambassadors were supposed to wait while their masters feasted within. Anne sped through the great vaulted place with a white rush; half-way across she paused and looked back for her sister, beginning to call out that she was first. But the words died away; her heart began to beat. What was this? Was it a horrible fancy? Fanny was

standing as if transfixed in the middle of the great brick area, gazing at the faded throne, upon which sat a figure also motionless, and watching them with strange dark glances. On one of the steps stood a capucin monk, with his face nearly hidden by a falling hood. It was only for an instant. Fanny gave a little shuddering scream, and Anne sprang forward and caught her sister with two outstretched hands, while the apparition slowly rose from its seat and began descending the steps. At the same instant old Angelo appeared with his keys, exclaiming and bowing, and welcoming his excellency.—'Who would have thought of his arriving thus! Only attended by his chaplain. His excellency would find everything ready to his command. What! the young English ladies. They should not have wandered in without permission,' said old Angelo severely. 'Ché! ché! What is this? Is the young lady taken with a vertigo?' The old fellow, who felt somewhat ashamed of his duplicity, tried to make up for it by assisting Anne to lead Fanny to one of the stone seats that skirted the room. He rubbed Fanny's little cold hands and jingled his keys reassuringly in her face. Fanny, fluttering and trembling, soon recovered, and prepared to go her way, although the whole place seemed to rock beneath her.

'I am sorry to have caused you alarm,' said his excellency, in very good English. 'My chaplain and I were discussing the decorations of the sala.'

'It is I who am so silly,' faltered poor Fanny, still trembling shyly, as she met the glance of those strange eyes. They were so wild, so sad, that she almost felt inclined to scream again.

'The young lady is here at home,' said Angelo, pointing to the landing.

'Will she not take my arm?' said the Marquis with some concern.

Anne would have interfered, but Fanny, trembling still, put her little hand on his arm.

He was a big, heavy-made man, not very active, though strongly built: he seemed to be about forty. His hair was of that blue black that is almost peculiar to Italians; his chin, which was shaved close, was blue; his eyes were so strange and magnetic that they seemed to frighten those on whom they fell. He had a curious sarcastic smile. Anne thought him horrible, and could not bear Fanny to accept his civilities. Fanny seemed like some bird fascinated, and without will of her own. As for the monk, he followed them indifferently, seeming scarcely aware of the little passing excitement. Barbi left the girls at the door, and Anne breathed again as it was closed upon him.

Mrs. de Travers made very light of Fanny's vertigo. Fanny's vertigos were of no consequence. If it had been Anne, it would have been different. Anne was her pride, her darling, her beautiful daughter. Mrs. de

Travers looked to Anne to redeem the fortunes of the family.

The poor woman had been stitching away at her daughters' frills in their absence, and preparing a scolding for their return.

When the evening came the girls were dressed and revived and ready to start for their ball. They went step by step down the great marble staircase, carefully holding up their dresses. It was *to-day* flitting through the Past, Anne's white flounces flicked the Grecian folds of one of the stately nymphs, Fanny's bournous caught in the sandal of a classic warrior. Mrs. de Travers, who was calculating her bills, poor thing, went stolidly down, on her way to the little open carriage that old Olympia had called from the Piazza, and in which the three drove off.

'Mind you rake out the fire and put out the candles, Olympia,' said Mrs. de Travers; 'you can light them again when you hear us come in.'

The moon was shining full up the street along which they drove. Fanny seemed silent and indifferent through it all. She was absorbed, and—instead of chattering, grumbling, laughing, keeping them all three alive by her sallies—she sat perched on the little back seat of the carriage, watching the passers-by. Then the three women came out of the star and moonlight into dazzling light and reflections. There was music floating out into the gardens, there were dancers flitting in time to the music,

and people coming and going, and smiling and greeting one another. The beautiful Roman ladies passed by with their dark shining tresses and their wondrous heirlooms flashing round their necks. Fanny began to wish for a diamond tiara and necklace. She felt sad and tired, though everything was so bright and so gaily beautiful. The ball was given in a palace belonging to a great sculptor, and the statues shivered softly where the lights fell. They seemed to stir, to look with strange, far-away eyes upon the dancers. Fanny felt as if she herself belonged to the country of statues. Anne was floating by on the waves of a waltz. Outside, in the garden, the mandolins were playing, the air came in heavy with roses; marble and moonlight and music were all in harmonious combination. Something of the serenity of the night seemed shining in Fanny's eyes, though she was so sad and this strange cold depression was upon her.

As Fanny was standing, a little brown figure in a window, watching the company, she happened to overhear two voices talking behind her. They were talking of ancient families and palaces; of a marquis lately returned from abroad. She could not see the people. The voices came through an open window, through which she could see the lights in the garden outside, where the people were strolling between the dances. Barbi's name floated in distinctly uttered by these unseen gossips.

'His father was a blacksmith,' said the voice; 'but he

was the undoubted heir to the estate. You need only look at Ottavio to recognise the likeness to the mareschal and the great cardinal.'

'Was anything ever known about that dreadful story?' asked the other voice.

'Nothing; for it happened the day before the poor Marchesa died, and all was consternation,' said the second gossip. 'They say she received a poisoned letter. Surely that is Don Stephano: how delighted I am to see him so recovered from his indisposition.' And so they walked on, and the gossiping died away into a romantic murmur.

Fanny cared nothing for Don Stephano, and ceased to listen. She still looked through the open window at the silver shield of moonlight, star-studded and shimmering upon the roses in the mandolin-resounding garden—and then, as she looked, she saw a tall figure in the doorway, and met the glance of those strange, fierce eyes that had haunted her all the day. It was the Marquis, grandly dressed, with a ribbon and an order and a diamond star. He looked grander than ever, thought Fanny; grander even than under that daïs where he had frightened her. Barbi, meeting Fanny's wistful bright eyes shining among clouds, and estranged looks, came straight up to where the little thing was standing, said a few words and passed on—passed on, leaving her all bewildered, excited. He seemed to her a sort of king and for ever under the daïs. A word from him was a distinc-

tion, thought the little idiot. She watched him proceeding through the rooms. It appeared to her that people made way before him, or could it be that they avoided him? Then she remembered old Angelo's shrugs and inuendoes. Ah! how wicked people were! how malicious! There was something half-hesitating in the way hands were held out to him. If her hand—poor little brown needle-stitched hand that it was—had been worth holding out, how gladly she would have given it. He was unhappy, very unhappy, that she could see. Then she heard the voices at her elbow again. They had left Don Stephano, glanced at the state of Europe, discussed the new dress for the Papal Zouaves, and had now come back to Ottavio Barbi and his affairs. She heard the word 'Barbi' again with a provoking cautious 'hmumumhmhmumum.'

'Poor child! if it was so, it was to escape from the Marquis,' said No. 1 more distinctly.

'He will not find it easy to marry again,' said No. 2.

'Oho!' said the first, with a laugh, 'he will not find much difficulty. Remember Henry Tudor, and the Sultan in the *Arabian Nights*.'

'Who were they?' said the lady.

'Hush!' said No 1.

There was Barbi, standing beside Fanny again, with a dark frown upon his handsome face, and the nostrils of his great hook-nose distended. The voices seemed to

falter away. Mrs. de Travers simpered up and shook out her purple satin. Fanny said nothing, but her little brown face was gratefully upturned. Barbi's frowns seemed to relax at her welcome and undisguised pleasure. If Fanny had been more used to admiration, she might have hesitated before she surrendered herself so absolutely to this passing fancy for a diamond star, a blue ribbon, a blue chin.

Little Fanny, who had laughed, and scolded, and grumbled briskly through life hitherto, suddenly felt as if the old Fanny existed no longer; as if this was the most eventful evening of all the evenings of her life. Long afterwards the sound of a mandolin would bring it all back to her again, conjure up the old love-story—ah, how vivid—though the love was over, the story ended, the tones and the words would come back and seem to repeat themselves in the empty air.

Fanny wondered if Barbi had overheard the two speakers. He said nothing; he made a grand bow, and asked to be introduced to her mother. Mrs. de Travers rose equal to the occasion: 'A marquis!—that was the society she really enjoyed.' As for poor little Fanny, perhaps from childish vanity she liked stars and titles, and yet her natural good taste made her blush for her mother as she paraded Lord Tortillion and Tourniquet Castle, and the Honourable John and the Honourable Joe, and all the titled splendour of the family. Then Fanny blushed

again when, having gravely listened to it all, the Marquis turned to her again, with one of those curious looks. He frightened her, and yet he fascinated her, and besides, it was very delightful to be talked to, and noticed, and treated with deference. One or two girls, passing by with their partners, glanced at them with some curiosity. Fanny flushed up with excitement.

'I am afraid you are not yet recovered, he said. 'Why do you not dance?'

'I am tired,' said Fanny, ashamed to confess that her partners were scarce.

'You danced too much this morning in my apartment,' said the Marquis, smiling. 'It was a pleasant surprise to find it so agreeably animated by the presence of ladies. Have you stayed long in the Palazzo Barbi?'

Mrs. de Travers gave an uneasy glance. Could he be calculating the rent? But the landlord went on courteously to say that he hoped they would command him, and that anything he could do that would be agreeable to them, would be a sincere pleasure to him; then he asked Mrs. de Travers if she would allow him to pay his respects to her next day. 'I am lonely in my empty apartments, I shall be grateful for kind neighbours.'

'*You*,' said Fanny, 'grateful to *us*?'

The Marquis looked kindly at her.

'You will, I hope, never know,' he said to Fanny, 'what a sad empty world this is to some, and how soon a

grave closes over one in the memories of those upon whom one has heaped benefits with open hands.'

He sighed as he spoke, and walked a little way towards the window. He was certainly a grand-looking figure, stately and composed, with a haughty melancholy way, that Fanny thought perfectly irresistible. The music ceased for an instant. Anne came up beaming to join them, only her sweet face somewhat fell when she saw who had been talking to them. At that instant one of the convent bells, that are in every street and broadway in Rome, began to strike a few quick strokes.

'Listen,' said Anne's partner, a young Roman; 'that is a summons to the Brothers of the Pietà. Look at those two stealing away.'

The young man shrugged his shoulders as he spoke: he belonged to the advanced liberal party, and liked dancing and liberty. Fanny said nothing, but she saw that the Marquis, too, had disappeared: she gave a great sigh of relief, and yet she was sorry.

CHAPTER IV.

A CARRIAGE; A MARQUIS.

THE Marquis called to inquire after the ladies next day. Old Olympia said they were resting after the ball.

'You don't suppose *my* masters are common people, who would be up at this hour?' said she.

The Marquis left three small thin varnished cards, with a crown on each, and the 'Marchese Barbi' engraved in finest steel. That afternoon a magnificent nosegay arrived, the most beautiful flowers set together in a silver paper zone. Anne made a little joke, and told Fanny she had charmed their neighbour, and that the bouquet was evidently meant for her.

Fanny blushed up red, and answered, 'You know I charm no one, Anne. No one will ever care for me. I wish you wouldn't say such things. I'm neither pretty nor good, and not like you, who are both. I'm sure I don't know why I wasn't made one or the other,' said Fanny, indignant.

'I am very glad you were made as you are,' said Anne.

The two were standing at their window: it was even-

ing time, and all the people were out in the streets, and all the sky was brightening with a white flame-like light, that seemed to shake the city into clearer and more vivid tints. As they looked the Marquis's great carriage came thundering into the courtyard, and they both ran away from the window.

Fanny was neither very pretty, nor very good, nor very patient. She was discontented too, and impatient and clever and warm-hearted, and almost hopeless at times. The poor little thing had grown so tired of the life they were leading, that she would have done almost anything to escape from it. She was naturally shy, except where her interest was roused; this struggle to 'keep up' was misery to her. To keep up? to what? to scraping and stinting and eking out halfpence to last for weeks, to other people's days.

'Oh, Anne, I wish I was a servant,' little Fanny sometimes said. 'I *am* a servant.'

Anne would preach patience, but Fanny had no patience. She put her flowers into water; she looked at them with odd wistful eyes.

'You might as well tell the flowers to take patience, and they will grow again,' said Fanny.

Poor Anne did not know what to say to her.

And so all day long the sun beat against the marble rocks of the great palace, and the days went on. Mrs. de Travers sat dozing in her place in society. The girls

stitched on. Sometimes, coming up the long stairs with old Olympia to guard them, they would meet their neighbour descending from his rooms. He would always stop and speak to them. Sometimes when they were at their open window, he would appear on the balcony below and look up with some sign of friendly greeting, but that was all. That odd sort of silent yet reserved intimacy was established between them which exists between people living in the same house, the circles of whose lives cross here and there and then diverge each on their way. One day old Angelo told them that the Marquis talked of returning to Florence. Fanny and Anne looked at each other in silence. They said nothing to their mother.

That very afternoon Fanny spied Barbi's back and the two soles of his feet in St. Peter's. He was kneeling in a confessional. Fanny and her sister and mother had come to listen to the singing in one of the chapels; for once they had left their cares behind them. In the cathedral all was so great, so silent, so harmonious that vexed fancies seemed stilled and quieted. Mrs. de Travers felt as if she had paid all her bills. Fanny forgets her shabby blue feather, and worn black silk. Anne wanders on quietly listening and looking. The clustering lights are burning round the shrine of St. Peter: dim columns stretch away in fire and cloud to other shrines and saints: far lights burn through a silent haze. A little family group comes across the marble aisle and goes and kneels by the

golden railing of the great St. Peter's shrine; a pretty little maiden of some twelve years old, in white, with a crown of white roses with a flowing veil,—like the maiden in the Vita Nuova,—the mother is in black, with a black gauze over her face; the father follows with a younger child; they all go and kneel together and give thanks for the first communion of the little daughter. The vesper song swells along the centre aisle, and seems spreading evening shadows of peace and rest after the labours of the day; the music travels on exquisite and tranquil, the voices run into cadence shriller yet more gentle than our own. A sense of peace, of self-abandonment, comes to one at such an hour; of dependence upon an outward and tranquillizing rule.

And yet the rule must be at the same time sorrow and burthen unendurable to those who are chained down bodily to the railings of those altars which should be but the emblems and phantoms of the eternal truth.

Something of this crossed Fanny's mind as the Marquis came out of the confessional under the swinging rod, and met them full in the centre of the aisle. He seemed moved and aged, with a look of harassed suffering in his face: it might have been the shade of his black hair. He would have passed on, but Mrs. de Travers, with presence of mind, instantly stopped short, and the poor Marquis found himself suddenly in the world again, in the hands of those very people from whom, for the moment, he most

wished to escape. Mrs. de Travers turned on the tap of her small talk. Anne tried to say something to set him free, but she broke down in her sentence. Fanny's face fell, and she sighed: the Marquis, hearing her sigh, hesitated, and suddenly gave up his efforts to break away.

'You have been listening to the music,' he said. 'I was hoping to come to pay my respects to you, and to take my leave. My stay here is at an end. I am going in another day to my house in Florence.'

'Oh, Marquis! Going! I am sure we shall miss you extremely,' said Mrs. de Travers, bewildered, and somewhat crestfallen.

The Marquis did not answer—he was watching Fanny's face. Little girls of eighteen have faces that often seem to speak without speaking—perhaps they sometimes say more than there is to tell. Fanny's blushes and changing looks meant that she was sorry, very sorry. That was all. That she was disappointed, that vague, intangible dreams of riches and jewels and palaces were dispelled. The Marquis, for all his penetrating black eyes, read more than there was to read. He suddenly asked the elder lady if she was going home, and begged leave to be allowed to drive her back with her daughters. Fanny looked radiant, reproachful; Anne looked grave. Mrs. de Travers said she had been accustomed to a carriage for years, and that she would gladly accept the Marquis's offer.

'I have not brought a servant,' said Mrs. de Travers,

as they came out together under the heavy curtain of the church.

The Marquis summoned his groom. They stood waiting for the carriage and overlooking the great piazza, that was now alight with the great last dying lights, striking on every column and passing figure.

Anne was silent and pre-occupied, so was the Marquis; but he assisted the ladies in, and jumped in himself. Mrs. de Travers was in a seventh heaven—a carriage, a coronet and springs—a Marquis sitting opposite and paying attentions to Fanny. Here was the reward of her long sacrifices.

Who that has ever been to Rome does not remember Roman streets of an evening, when the day's work is done? They are all alive in a serene and home-like fashion. The old town tells its story. Low arches cluster with life—a life humble and stately, though rags hang from the citizens and the windows. You realize it as you pass—their temples are in ruins, their rule is over—their colonies have revolted long centuries ago. Their gates and their columns have fallen as the trees of a forest, cut down by an invading civilization, but they are rulers still, a noble and a simple race, greater than their fate.

As Barbi's carriage drove along, the evening was falling fast. They passed groups standing round their doorways; a blacksmith hammering with great straight blows at a copper pot, shouting to a friend, a young baker, naked

almost, except for a great sheet flung over his shoulders, and leaning against the door of his shop—the horses tramp on; listen to the flow of fountains falling with spray against the dark marbles; listen to the murmur of voices. An old lady, who has apparently hung all her wardrobe out of window, in petticoats and silk handkerchiefs, is looking out from beneath these banners, at the passers in the streets. Little babies, tied up tight in swaddling-clothes, are being poised against their mothers' hips; a child is trying to raise the great knocker of some feudal-looking arch, hidden in the corner of the street. Then they cross the bridge and see the last sun's rays flaming from St. Angelo's sacred sword.

Driving on, through the tranquil streets, populous and thronged with citizens,—they see brown-faced, bronze-headed Torsos in balconies and window-frames; citizens sitting tranquilly, resting on the kerbstones, with their feet in the gutters; grand-looking women resting against their doorways. The occupants of the carriage were silent; nor was there much talk in the street, nor shouting, such as one hears in our English street, where the people are coming and going, instead of merely resting and looking on.

They passed some priests, an old white-headed monk, with a younger friar in attendance. Barbi respectfully uncovered to the dignitary, who blessed the carriageful in return. Fanny opened her eyes, Mrs. de Travers bowed graciously. Sibyls out of the Sistine were sitting on the

steps of the churches. In one stone archway sat the Fates spinning their web. There was a holy family by a lemonade-shop, and a whole heaven of little Correggio angels scattered dark-eyed along the road, gazing at the carriage rolling by. Then comes a fountain falling into a marble basin, at either end of which two little girls are clinging and climbing. Here is a little lighted May altar to the Virgin, which the children have put up under the shrine at the street-corner. They don't beg clamorously, but stand leaning against the wall, waiting for a chance miraculous *baioch*. . . . Here are the gates of the Barbi Palace, and Mrs. de Travers' brief triumph is over.

'I should like to live in an open carriage,' says Fanny, tripping upstairs. 'Why does one want a house? One could dine at the pastrycook's, and pay visits when it rained.'

'But suppose the people were out?' said Anne.

'Don't talk such nonsense to the Marquis,' said Mrs. de Travers.

But the Marquis smiled. 'Should you like a carriage?' said he to Fanny.

'Good-bye—thank you,' said Fanny, blushing again, and not answering.

CHAPTER V.

A TROUSSEAU.

NEXT morning, Anne, hearing her mother scream loudly hurried into the salle where the breakfast was laid. Mrs de Travers held a letter in her hand, the teapot was over flowing, a chair was upset.

'Oh, my darling child,' cries Mrs. de Travers, 'come here! see what you owe to your old mother's life of sacrifice Not you, Anne! Where is my Fanny? Where is—there my paper! A pen, child—quick! A marquis! What am I saying?'

Mrs. de Travers rushed into Fanny's room, embraced her as she stood there, with all her hair falling over her shoulders.

'Fanny, Fanny, I knew it! I knew that I should be rewarded!' cries the silly woman. 'Here! read this—read this!'

And Mrs. Travers, who was quite over-excited, clasped her hands, shook her head, and burst into tears of rapture.

Fanny shed no tears. She was perfectly composed as she read the following letter, written in English, in

small flourishing hand, with an enormous crown and a great B at the top.

'Palazzo Barbi, April 17, 18—.

'Most Esteemed Madame,—I feel impelled to open to you an affair which interests my feelings in the highest degree, and which concerns the destiny of your most cultivated and virtuous daughter. The admirable Miss Fanni is not aware of my project, although I imagine that it may not be displeasing to her, and that you may favour my desire to unite myself with a person so 'complished. I would make every arrangement befitting my station. She shall have four servants to her orders and a *mesatta* of 100 crowns. I would also fix for your life an annuality of 400 crowns, desiring that the mother of my spouse should enjoy all the commodities fitting her respectable station.

'I protest myself, most esteemed madame,

'Your most devoted

'ENRICO OTTAVIO BARBI.

It was certainly a very strange affair, and so everybody looked and said and thought, when it was announced that the Marquis Barbi was engaged to little Fanny de Travers, that small brown insignificant little person. To be sure she was a Catholic, and well connected; but there were about 1,000 Catholic young ladies in Rome better looking, and with grand relations. As for Fanny herself, how she could make up her mind to marry that man with all those stories about, and that well-known temper, was more than

anyone could imagine, except that it was what was done every day. Everybody knew that Mrs. de Travers was absolutely starving, with those two girls dependent on her. Everybody disapproved of everything; but the inhabits of the palazzo did not trouble themselves on this account. The Marquis came every day to call upon his intended, and sat in the little birdcage room, leaning back in the armchair, and smiling at her lively sallies. There was no doubt about it that he was very much in love. He had tried to overcome his fancy, but a look of those bright brown eyes that day in St. Peter's had called him back just as he was escaping. One cannot account for such things. He was a solemn, changeable, violent, and haughty man: her quickness and vivacity suited and amused him, but sometimes even Fanny's sallies seemed to displease him. One day she asked him what he kept in the old oak chest in his room.

'What business is that of yours?' he thundered out, in a voice that made Mrs. de Travers jump in her shoes. Another day he had lost his keys. There never was such a scene as he made. The whole palace was searched, but finally old Angelo had to go for the locksmith. The Marquis never left him all the time he was at work, nor would he allow anyone but himself to empty out the oak chest when the lock was repaired.

Grand clothes and jewels became Fanny. She looked pretty now for the first time in her life, and almost

outshone her sister; and every day grand clothes and jewels were brought up the marble stairs to the little side door; if they went down again, they went down rustling upon her little person, and shining upon her neck and her fingers. The Marquis insisted upon providing her trousseau, and not only her trousseau, but Mrs. de Travers' wedding-garment and Anne's bridesmaid's dress. As for Fanny's old everyday gowns, they were much too shabby to be given to the elegant ladies'-maid who was engaged to attend upon her. They were rolled up in a cupboard and put away. And so at first, all seemed radiance and rainbows, and pink flames and flourish of trumpets. Every day the Marquis's equipage came champing and glittering to the side-door of the palace. Every day Fanny and her mother, arrayed in their new splendours, stepped in and drove off to the various shops where they made their purchases—to Bianchi's, to Castellani's, to Spillman's. Fanny had a passion for cakes and bonbons, and certain days in the week had leave to order in an unlimited supply—on Sunday, on Monday, on Tuesday. Poor Fanny would have driven up to the pastrycook's door on Wednesday as usual, but Barbi, with a sudden frown, said,—'Not to-day, my little Fanny.' And so they went somewhere else instead. Sometimes they drove to see beautiful pictures and statues; sometimes they stood, with the rest of the carriages, on the Pincio, in a fashionable halo of sunset and pink parasols; sometimes they went for miles and

miles across the Campagna. It would grow purple and beautiful. There was the story of the past written along the road, and the remembrance of a heroic age to make the silence of the plains more solemn than all the clattering of foreign trumpets and drums that they heard round about the fort of St. Angelo.

Anne rarely came with them. She kept to herself, and went her own way. People said she was disappointed, and that she had also hoped to secure the rich prize. They did her a cruel injustice. She shrunk from Barbi instinctively, from his bold ways and fierce wild looks. His dogged vehemence frightened her. He seemed to her unlike a gentleman at times, for all his grand courtly ways. She used to wander by herself in the garden, cry a little in secret, thinking of her sister's future, visit one or two of the poor people in the neighbourhood, go and pray in the church close by, attended by old Olympia. And yet, though Anne trembled, Fanny seemed happy. Her eyes shone, her cheeks were bright and flushed; she tried on all her clothes, and had one of the large painted pier-glasses carried up from the apartment below, the better to admire the cut of her trains.

One day a something—a nothing—happened that seemed to give substance to Anne's visions of ill. Barbi was absent. He had been summoned on business of importance. And the three ladies accepted an invitation they had received to join a party of sight-seers bent upon visit-

ing the Coliseum by moonlight. They did not care for the people; but Fanny liked the moon, and Anne loved the old ruins; and Mrs. de Travers liked to be seen in Lady Castleairs' company, and so they went. Lady Castleairs kept them waiting, and it was a little late before they started. In one of the narrow streets they were further delayed by a long procession, of which they had heard the chanting in the distance, as they came driving along. Suddenly appeared a great dazzle of lights, at the top of the street. The two carriages drew up at a point where three streets met by a fountain; the servants uncovered, and Death—and death in life—came slowly down between the houses; life making way for the solemn dirge to pass. Nearer and nearer came the lights and the voices of the funeral procession. They passed close by the company of sight-seers. The falling waters reflected the torches; loud and stunning came the chant; white choristers a-head, then the monks in their brown cowls carrying tapers; then the confraternity of the Pietà walking two by two, carrying the coffin, with their faces hidden by blue silken masks, and their bare feet in sandals. A dazzle of burning tapers followed, winding along the narrow street; people hurried to their windows to look; others crowded along the foot-way, kneeling and crossing themselves; incense and wax lights filled the air.

'How terrible it is!' said Fanny, awe-stricken. 'Oh, mamma, let us go.'

As she spoke she met the gaze of a tall masked brother, bearing a taper in his hand, and walking along with a somewhat freer and more stately step than the rest. Their eyes met for an instant. Fanny turned away.

'Go on! certainly, my dear,' said Mrs. de Travers. 'Drive on, coachman.'

But the coachman, with a significant glance, raised his hat and said it would be as much as his place was worth to drive on a step until the procession had passed. And so they stood listening, as the chant echoed farther away along the slanting streets, and all was dark and silent again. But the Coliseum was lovely, and once there their spirits revived. The old place seemed alive with people, and the voices seemed to thrill more musically in the moonlight than by day. The party was so pleasant, that Fanny thought no more of the funeral. Red lights and torches were darting from one crumbling gallery to another; people were standing high among the ruins; their figures upraised against the starlight, and calling to their friends below. Fanny had sat down upon the step of the central cross. Her white dress shimmered in the clear moonlight; she was very silent for a time, then she started up and joined the others, and talked and chattered the loudest of them all. 'What spirits the child has!' said Mrs. de Travers to Lady Castleairs. A pair of lovers wandering arm-in-arm in the radiance

turned to look after the lady who was so soon to be the bride of the great Marchese Barbi.

'Ah, they have not to wait and work for years,' said the young girl bitterly.

'Perhaps they don't care about each other as we do,' said the young man, laughing; 'and would not be sorry to wait.'

They were all coming away, and had taken a last look at the place, and passed the sentries, but the carriages delayed, and Anne said to her sister, 'Come back,' and Fanny put her hand into hers with a strange gentleness, and followed her under the black arches where the sentries were pacing. The two girls hurried along, for fear their companions might be waiting. The great circle was empty now of voices and figures moving. It was not the place it had been only a moment before; but a holy silver shrine, silent at last, deserted, intensely clear. As the sisters stood looking, still hand in hand, the two lovers, who had also lingered, passed by without seeing them in the black shadow of the archway. 'Anima mia!' whispered the young man, as he passed. Anne could not hear the girl's answer, but she felt her sister's hand tremble in hers. It seemed to grow colder and colder as she held it still. That night she was awakened by a sob from Fanny's bed. Fanny said she had been dreaming. Was it so? or had she been awakening from a dream? However it might be, in the morning came a beautiful

set of turquoises for Fanny's adornment, and she protested she was happy.

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday went by. The Marquis came at twelve, and stayed all day till eleven o'clock at night, with the exception of the dinner-hour, for which he retired. Thursday morning Anne found her sister at half-past eleven o'clock in tears, ready dressed in one of her beautiful new dresses.

'It was nothing,' Fanny said. 'Why did Anne come worrying her? She must go away. The Marquis would be there. He would not like to find her.' But as Anne turned away, hurt and annoyed, two arms were flung round her neck. 'How can you expect me never to cry,' says Fanny, with a stamp, 'leaving you and my home for that great gloomy place downstairs, and that gloomy man?'

'Oh, Fanny,' said Anne, horrified, 'don't you love him? I—I hoped at least you loved him.'

Fanny seemed to grow more angry than ever. 'I love him well enough,' she said, with a sudden fresh burst of tears; 'only I no longer am able to do as I like. What is the good of marrying if one can't do as one likes?'

Did Fanny expect to do as she liked when she married Barbi? Jealous, narrow, exclusive,—a violent man, accustomed to rule and to dominate over all those who came in contact with him. There is nothing more curious than the dominion some persons now and then establish over others perhaps a hundred times cleverer, warmer-

hearted, more tractable, wiser than themselves. A sheer strength of will seems sometimes to count for more in the commerce of life than all the grace, and accomplishment, and study, and good intention in the world. Barbi knew that there were very few people whom he could not rule. Fanny had charmed him, but that was no reason why she should not obey his wishes. Barbi had been attracted from the very moment when he first beheld her. Was it a likeness? It may have been so, and that to him Fanny was partly charming for some one else's sake. But now that she was engaged to him, she found that if she had been ruled before with a rod of flax, it was a rod of iron now. She never seemed to be alone. He was always there; even when he was away, he seemed to be present,—always expecting her to be ready to talk to him, to listen to him, to admire him. Fanny, who, as we know, was an impatient and quick-witted person, found the hours grow longer and longer, the minutes turning into hours; there she sat in her beautiful silk dress, with satin trimmings. There he sat opposite, with his blue chin, and his strangely frizzled black hair, and his dark, stupid features: Anne began to grow seriously uneasy. There was something haggard and terror-stricken at times in her sister's face which frightened her.

Mrs. de Travers was radiant, and bought a new purple satin. She somehow paid her bills, and yet had money in hand. She appeared with a nodding feather in her

bonnet. People called to congratulate, although not in very great numbers. Lady Castleairs came and invited the Marquis to her evenings: he seemed pleased by the attention. An old lady who rented a quaint little apartment at the other end of the palace also called. Madame Riccabocca was her name. She had watched them with great interest, she said, from her window. She looked very kind and grave, and took both the girl's hands in hers and sighed. 'Oh, I hope you may be happy,' she said: 'I *hope* so!' Fanny was delighted by the congratulations, and when her old grandfather heard of the great match she was making, he sent over from Tourniquet Castle a handsome cheque for her trousseau. This, as Mrs. de Travers remarked, was rendered quite unnecessary by Barbi's liberality. She therefore kept it for some future occasion. The Marquis made no objection. But he looked very black at Madame Riccabocca when he met her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET.

ALTHOUGH Catholics, they had never been very strict in their religious observances, but Fanny now took to going to mass every morning, and also, when Friday came, she fasted with a rigour which greatly disturbed her mother. Barbi, who was sitting by (he was going down to his own dinner half-an-hour later), looked on, but said nothing. Next morning, however, when he came, he brought his Frances a magnificent diamond ring, which he placed on her finger.

'This has always belonged to a Marchioness Barbi,' he said, saluting Fanny's blushing cheeks.

It was bad enough that Fanny should fast on Friday. Saturday, too, she abstained, although veal cutlets were her favourite dish, and old Olympia's *frittatura* was celebrated. Barbi was again present at their meal. He had dined early, he said, and excused himself from touching anything.

On Sunday morning came a handsome gold chain, and all sorts of delicious little cakes and pasties from Spill-

man's. Fanny clapped her hands like a child. Anne did not know what to think. Fanny often had strange dreams at night, from which she started up, sobbing. Once, in the darkness, she cried out, 'Anne, Anne, what *shall* I do?'

'Do!' cried Anne, starting up in bed. 'Break off this horrid marriage. Dearest Fanny, don't cry. Send him away, and we will go and hide ourselves, and work, and be happy, or miserable. What will it matter, so long as we are together?' Fanny sobbed and sobbed, and did not answer.

In the morning, Anne came in to breakfast with her heart in her mouth, as people say. Fanny did not appear: her maid was curling her hair (since her engagement she had always had her breakfast sent in to her). Mrs. de Travers was looking with some curiosity on a large smooth packet, that looked something like a nice flat loaf from the baker's, tied up in brown paper and white satin ribbon.

'What can it be?' said Mrs. de Travers. 'Another splendid present, no doubt. Olympia, take the parcel in to the Marchesa. Certainly, Fanny is a most fortunate girl, and I can only hope that you, my Anne, may be equally lucky.'

'Oh, mamma,' said Anne, 'nothing would ever induce me to marry a man like the Marquis—not twice as many

houses and diamonds. Oh, mamma, do you think Fanny is happy?'

'Happy!' cried Mrs. de Travers. 'She is the happiest —most—most—most——'

Words failed Mrs. de Travers; but she added, severely, 'I hope, Anne, you have not been putting any nonsense into her head?'

'Dear mamma,' said Anne, bursting into tears and clasping her hands, 'I *know* she is unhappy. Let us save her while it is time. If you had but heard the stories that I *know* to be true!'

Mrs. de Travers was so indignant that it was all she could do not to give her eldest daughter a shake.

'If ever I hear you say one word of this ungrateful, unnatural nonsense, I shall believe what people say of you, Anne, that you are jealous,' cried the angry woman. 'Stories, indeed! Who cares for stories? I am for deeds, not words,' says Mrs. de Travers, with a glance at her new satin.

'Angelo told me of a poor peasant maiden who drowned herself,' faltered Anne. 'Madame Riccabocca, down below, says he deserted a girl on the eve of his marriage, and then broke his wife's heart. . . . Oh, mamma, question Fanny, I entreat you. She is miserable—I know she is,' cried poor Anne. As she spoke, Fanny entered, radiant and resplendent, in rippling

strings of great diamonds, each worth a moderate-sized house.

Fanny looked anything but miserable. She burst out into shrill laughter when her mother, also laughing, sarcastically told her of Anne's absurd nonsense. She said she must go down and thank 'Ottavio' that instant for his splendid present, and she ran out of the room. Fanny knew the way, and hurrying along the endless suite, went to the door of the yellow room and tapped, without receiving an answer. But she heard some one stirring, and turning the handle of the door, she peeped in, and saw the Marquis, with his back to the door, bending over the old oak box in the window, which had once excited her curiosity. Seeing her there, he closed the lid suddenly, and came to the door. Fanny felt a little frightened when she found herself face to face with the Marquis, who came outside the door, closing it behind him. He looked agitated, pale, trembling. She could not think what was the matter with him.

'You here, Fanny?' he said, not unkindly, as he sometimes spoke, but in a hoarse, abrupt voice. 'Leave me, child, leave me. I am occupied—I have business.'

'I came to thank you for your splendid present,' said Fanny.

'Why thank me?' said he. 'I do not value those diamonds. Keep them — keep them — but leave me now.'

He looked about; he seemed excited, and scarcely himself.

'What is the matter?' said Fanny, laying her hand on his arm; 'something troubles you. Tell me what it is. What were you doing? You know I have a right to all your secrets now,' she added, gaily.

As she spoke the thought came to her that, perhaps, if he would tell her more of himself, she might lose her fear of him. 'You tell me so little,' said Fanny.

'Tell you more!' said the Marquis. 'You don't know what you say. My present from this date belongs to you. Do not seek to know what is past. See!' said he, pointing with some dignity, 'all these things are open to you. All that is mine will be yours, Miss; but my own past,' he added, 'and the secrets of others, I warn you to leave them undisturbed.' He had raised his voice. 'I am too proud to use artifice, to conceal: I trust to your honour.' The words seemed to echo from room to room.

Then he took her by the hand, conducted her in silence to the door of her mother's apartment, and left her. Fanny afterwards seemed to remember that a bell had been tolling all the time of their talk. When he joined them at the usual hour, he made no allusion to the morning; but as he took leave at night, he took her hand and held it tight and fierce in his great clasp.

'Miss Fanni,' he said, 'did you understand me to-day?

Remember, I allow no questions concerning my private affairs.'

'Why are you so mysterious and melodramatic?' faltered little Fanny, trying for the last time to be brave and to face her terrors. 'Why are you going? Where are you going to now?'

Barbi was standing at the top of the great flight of stairs; he stopped. 'Where am I going to now? That I do not choose—I am not permitted to tell you,' he answered, sadly and coldly. Then he took her hand once more. 'Poor child, be content. Ah! remain at peace in the blessing of your unconscious innocence. Do not try to penetrate the miserable secrets of a life such as mine.' Then once more some cloud seemed to fall. 'Remember that I expect obedience,' he said. 'Go where you will, do as you will during my absence, but respect the secret I leave to your honour. I see your suspicion in your eyes; nor do I conceal from you that I have a secret, and that it is hidden in the casket in my room; but, Fanni, I forbid you to inquire of others. I allow no questions concerning my private affairs. Another woman, less worthy than you, broke her word, and the consequences fell upon her own head.' Then with some sudden emotion he raised her hand to his lips. 'Ah! my Fanni, you are too young, too gentle for evil to approach your sweet life. Do not ask, do not inquire. Promise!

promise!' He caught her up wildly in his arms, then turned and hurried down stairs.

No questions—how was that to be? One person and another came with scraps of gossip; hint after hint, almost wordless, perhaps, at first, but gathering shape as time went on. He had been twice four times married. He had been about to be married, and the marriage had been broken off at the last moment. He kept a death's-head and cross-bones in a box by his bed. There were no end to the stories which seemed to fall from every side, like the arrows of an unknown enemy.

Still Fanny persisted in her resolution.

CHAPTER VII.

BLUEBEARD'S KEYS.

BARBI had been gone three days, and since he had left the girls and their mother had come hither and thither, exploring every corner of the grand old place. They had looked at the title-deeds and patents lying in the great strong boxes, at the stores in the old cupboards. It is the custom in some Italian families, at the death of any one of the members, to carry off all their personal possessions —tapestries, china, valuable engravings—to store-rooms under the roof, where they lie unvisited and undisturbed as years go by. Barbi himself did not know of the prizes and possessions which the three ladies discovered during his absence: early Raphael drawings, sketches by Michael Angelo, a 'Holy Family' by Correggio more beautiful than anything in the palace below. All these things were waiting in the labyrinths up above for the future possessor who was to come and disinter them. Fanny tried to think of china and tapestry instead of crime and hidden mystery, and to be content with the sense of all these magnificent possessions, instead of the confidence of an undoubting

heart. And yet she had rather have known the contents of a certain old oaken box than look through all these cupboards and galleries of rich possessions put together. But then she had got to think—she could not have told you why—that her betrothed had hidden his heart in that old oaken chest. One day—it was the last before Barbi's return—her mother had gone out for her daily drive, Anne was in the garden sunning and sighing,—the ladies'-maid was cross and worn out packing the enormous boxes —everything seemed like a dream and unreal, and Fanny felt dull and wandered into the great rooms below to reassure herself, I think, and to realize that Fate had indeed brought her to be mistress of this great estate.

She wandered down the marble flight, and found the great door of the great throne-room open wide, and old Angelo dusting as usual. Angelo did most of the work of the palace, for, rich as he was, the Marquis had come to Rome for a short time only; his home was in Florence, whither he proposed to take his bride. His dinner came in from the pastrycook's, his splendid saloons looked somewhat dingy and neglected, and he lived himself in the two little rooms at the very end, of which previous mention has been made.

Fanny was now more at home in the rooms below than she had been the first day she danced down them so merrily. To-day she no longer danced, but, on the contrary, walked with no little dignity with her Genoese

velvet trailing half a yard after her. As she passed the great dais a foolish fancy took her to jump up and sit on the throne, as she had seen the Marquis sitting that first day when they met. Here was a scene of triumph! Old Angelo looked up and bowed his old head over his duster. 'Padrona,' said he, respectfully. Fanny laughed, but at the same time pictured to herself all the élite of Roman society, Lady Castleairs amongst them, passing before her. There she would sit, and slightly bow her head. How they all would envy her and wish that they had been more kind. Then she pictured the Marquis with his diamond star sitting there beside her! Why did the thought of her future husband now always bring a chill along with it? At first it had seemed to her so great an honour to be noticed by him that a life's gratitude could scarcely repay it. And now already she began dimly to feel she had made a mistake, that a life is a terribly large sum which can only be paid by instalments—not all at once, but day by day. Fanny had begun to be afraid of herself. She loved her ease did this little woman, and to do her justice she had thought of her mother and sister as much as of herself. *Would* it be ease? thinks Fanny, leaning back among the cushions. Somehow a vision had haunted her of the young couple wandering arm-in-arm across the Coliseum, their shadows passing together over the moonlit pavement, their eyes meeting in happy response. Was it so with her? Ah, no, no! It was no

sentiment, no irresistible charm that had led her. Fanny did not dare own it to herself, she had scarcely realized it hitherto, but a bitter disappointment was hers. It was all hard, and cold, and dreary, notwithstanding the diamonds, the velvets, the four attendants promised for her use. Ah! why was this so? With a sudden impulse she tore off her beautiful diamond ring and threw it down; it did not fall farther than the cushions at her feet, where it lay sparkling.

Fanny, with a sigh, and yet ashamed of her childishness, stooped to pick it up once more, and slipped it on her finger. At the same time she saw that there was something lying beside the ring. It was a small bunch of keys on a chain made of worked steel, with a little coronet embossed. One of the keys was a quaint and old-fashioned looking specimen. Its handle was of steel, made into the pattern of two hearts entwined. No doubt the keys belonged to the Marquis, and that he had dropped them there. These were the keys about which he had been so much disturbed. Ah! how different he had seemed to her that first day! Why do people change? thought Fanny.—Why do we change ourselves and grow fickle, and faithless, Fanny, and then cry out disturbed because we are travelling on with the universal progress?

'Why, Fanny, what are you doing?' said Anne, coming in.

Fanny jumped down, looking ashamed. 'I am doing foolish things,' she said, slipping the keys into her pocket.

She was still thoughtful: no wonder—a maiden on the eve of her marriage. She walked on along the rooms; her sister followed: they had come down the endless suite. Here was the door of the yellow room open wide, and that of the bed-room beyond. The servants left in charge had neglected to set things in order. Italian servants take their duties deliberately, and are apt to put them off till the evening. Anne flitted about. Fanny sat down by the table. Her heart was beating, and her cheeks were burning red, like two summer roses. Should she leave his secrets, and have done with them and with him? Should she go back and finish out the play? What was she doing? she kept asking herself: for what was she selling her youth? She had loved him a little, but her fear had overmastered her love, and now she only trembled at his coming. Would she take him if he were as poor as herself? Ah! no, no, thought Fanny, wringing her hands.

Fanny's eyes wandered sadly round the room. Here, her future life was to be spent she thought to herself. There Barbi would sit in that gilt arm-chair just opposite, sit with his dark moody face bent upon her, with his dark secrets hidden away. The secret that explained his mysterious absences, and reticences, and penances, should she

ever be able to forget for one instant that it existed? 'Am I to pay with all the rest of my life for the crimes he has committed?' thought Fanny rebelliously. 'I am a horrid little worldly wretch: I haven't committed any crimes in my life—but I should like to commit one now. My honour! Is it honourable to have secrets; to hide away dreadful things in boxes? Anne!' cried poor little Fanny in a sudden frenzy. Anne did not hear her; her back was turned, she was looking out into the courtyard from the open window.

A sudden impulse and determination to know the worst came over my heroine. Of what use were scruples when a whole life's peace was at stake? thought Fanny, desperately.

Who could say? Perhaps if she knew all she might be able to find some way out of the troubles which seemed to overwhelm poor Barbi—she might—she might. Fanny did not give herself time to think what she might be able to do, she sprang across the room, fell on her knees, and thrust the key into the lock.

Anne turned with a little exclamation, as the old cabinet flew open. What was this—was this the mystery! The first thing that Fanny saw, in her conscience-stricken terror, were her own wild and frightened-looking eyes staring back at her, and then two more, for Anne had come up, and was standing behind; there was a looking-glass in the old oak lid, where the peasant

maiden, to whom it had once belonged, had often smiled at herself, at her own bright eyes, and coral necklace.

At the top of the chest lay a large heap of clothes, thrust in and crushed down as if they had been hastily concealed. Some bodices such as those worn by the neighbouring peasant girls, cut across the breast and pierced with bodkin-like holes; others of richer material were slashed with crimson and purple and bound with golden cord. They were some of the clothes worn by the two women Barbi had called his wives, over which the poor wretch would perform a hundred frantic acts of penitence and remorse.

Was this all! some half-dozen letters, out of one of which fell a lock of hair, some trinkets, a coral necklace, a diamond ring, with a broken coronet, a couple of cases for photographs: underneath all the blue hood of the Society of the Brothers of Piety, and a sort of whip or discipline, of long iron chain, rusted in places and fastened to a handle.

Fanny pulled out the things one by one, and opened one of the photograph cases. 'Oh, Anne, look here!' she said.

The case contained a picture: the face of the maiden in the picture they had so often looked at, young and sweet and wistful, with great gentle beseeching eyes. Lucetta was written beneath it, with a date.

On the second case was a coronet, and within was a

long melancholy hatchet-face, with 'Marchesa Barbi née Mangiascudi' written in Barbi's own handwriting. Fanny found a third portrait in this curious receptacle of the Marquis's reminiscences. It was her own: as she had given it to him, in a little oval frame; and beside it lay a glove she had lost one night upon the staircase.

Fanny knelt absorbed in her investigations. She had forgotten that she was doing wrong. It seemed to her as if the one thing she cared about in all the world was the truth. . . A packet of little, cramped, yet legibly written letters! perhaps they might explain, and with trembling hands she began to open them.

'Oh, Fanny, don't,' Anne said, very faintly; for Anne, with all her sweetness, was human, and curious too.

Fanny glanced at the letters. They seemed to be the love-letters of some village-girl. 'She was expecting him —when was he coming back? life without him was not worth living. All was ready for their marriage; the parents had consented.' Then came a wife's letters. 'She had seen him go with a failing heart; she trembled that harm might befall him: but he had been summoned by the learned doctors to claim his inheritance: he had been right to go.' Another letter, dated long after, implored him with many, many loving words, to return. 'Where was he? had he forgotten his wife, his home? No; for money had come, precious gifts, a beautiful coral, such as she had longed for; but she wanted no gifts, she wanted

him—she was ill—she was anxious and foolish; she sent him her picture, was she not changed? but ever his faithful longing Lucetta.

Fanny nervously turned to the last letter in the packet, for she seemed to hear a tramp of horses and sounds in the court below. Anne ran to the window. 'Oh! Fanny, if this should be the Marchese returning;' she cried. Fanny scarcely heard her. With pale wild glances she was reading on, fascinated, horrified, unable to put down the papers, although she dimly heard a tramp of feet, a rolling of wheels. No wonder Barbi concealed such revelations of his past. Poor Lucetta! abandoned by him, disowned. It was a terrible letter. It called on Heaven to forgive him his crime. What, being married already, he had basely deserted his wife, and united himself to another unhappy woman, disgraced now although so nobly born, also deceived, also broken-hearted! He had been ashamed (perhaps it was no wonder!), in his high estate, of owning to his humble home in the village. 'The thought of his sin,' said Lucetta, 'was more than she could bear. She had prayed, she had suffered penance. Every day she lived his sin was the greater, she said. While she lived he was living in sin, if she died he could at least marry the woman he had betrayed. She would live no longer. She sent him a last, last, last farewell. She would fain see him once again, and should stand at the door of his palace when he drove by with his

noble lady wife, and then, she said, her life's dream would be ended. She should die for him, and she felt that it was no crime to hide herself for ever in the flowing river.'

Underneath, in a different hand, was written :—'Found and read by me, Sibilla di Mangiascudi—disgraced, insulted, and deceived.'

Fanny had not been mistaken when she heard carriage-wheels, and voices coming along the rooms.

'Listen! they are coming. It *is* the Marquis,' cried Anne, desperate, and running to the door of the room, and pushing it.

Fanny did not lose her presence of mind.

'Go down into the garden,' she said, 'through the bed-room. Quick! I will follow.'

She was quite calm. She felt that the crisis had come. She hastily threw back the things, closed the box, locked it, and stood there with quivering lips as the door opened and Barbi came in. He looked darker and more gloomy than ever.

'What are you doing here?' he said, abruptly. But Fanny did not answer. 'What have you there?' he asked again, advancing.

Fanny answered nothing, but slowly raised her hand and gave him the keys, without a word. Then she screamed, for he seized her little wrist with such a grip that the blood came starting where the diamond-ring cut her fingers, and as he took the keys into his hand he saw

that the double heart handle was stained with the drops of blood.

'What is that?' he said, almost wildly. 'Who gave them to you? Who are you that you pry into my secrets, and throw my sacred relics under foot?' And he pointed to the peasant's handkerchief that Fanny, in her haste, had left upon the floor. He seemed half beside himself.

'You, too, shall die,' he said. '*She* did not deserve it, but another woman before you burst open my sacred past, and she died of shame and a broken heart. Ah, Fanni, Fanni, I thought you at least would have obeyed me.'

His eyes were so strange that Fanny thought his reason must be affected, but it was not so—he was superstitious to an extraordinary degree, but perfectly sane.

'Your life henceforth,' he said, 'will be embittered as mine is, and haunted by her memory, and saddened by penance. Ah, Fanni, Fanni, what have you done? You have undone us both.'

'Yes,' said Fanny, trembling very much. 'You are right. I cannot marry you now. I beg your pardon. I should not have read your letters. I am an ungrateful little creature, forgive me. Good-by.'

'Good-by!' shouted Barbi, who seemed half out of himself—in a sort of frenzy. 'You know my secrets—you are mine! You have promised—you are mine! I

do not let you go! Do you think you deserve no punishment for your treachery?'

He was in a fury, and stamped and looked so wild and so terrible that Fanny, frightened out of her wits, started away.

'I do not let you go! I do not let you out of my sight till we are married!' said Barbi, striding after her; but, with a sudden spring, she ran into the bed-room, the door of which Anne was holding open, and the two girls banged it in his face. He seemed to them capable of killing Fanny on the spot.

'Anne, Anne! What are we to do? Can we get out by the garden?' said Fanny, pointing to the staircase door.

'It is locked. The lower door is locked,' said Anne, wringing her hands. A tremendous thundering blow upon the door made the two girls start again. 'Let us call for help,' said Fanny. 'Yes, yes, I'm here,' she cried to Barbi, to quiet him, for every minute she thought the door would come down. 'Go to the staircase-window, Anne, and see if you can get at any help.'

'Let me in!' said Barbi, with another tremendous blow.

'I beseech you be calm,' cried Fanny. 'I will come if you will be calm. You frighten me.'

'You deserve it!' shouted Bluebeard, furiously.

'Anne, Anne, do you see anyone coming?' said Fanny, running to the head of the stairs.

'I see a cloud of dust. They are beating carpets in the garden,' said Anne. 'But, oh! they won't look up.'

Again the door shook on its hinges.

'Anne, I shall die,' said Fanny, crying. 'Do call out —scream! he will kill us.'

'Here are two brothers of the Pietà,' cried Anne, 'advancing along the terrace-walk. If I could but make them hear . . . That bell will drown my voice. Help! help!' she cried. Then she came running in, pale and trembling. 'They hear me! They have got the key of the garden-door,' she said. At the sound of the bell, Barbi's blows had suddenly increased.

'Let me through, let me through!' he cried, violently . . .

Suddenly the door opened wide—the two members of the confraternity stood before him.

'Come!' they said. 'Do you not hear the summons?'

Barbi hastily pulled his blue mask over his face. And while Anne and her sister stood clinging to each other in tears, the three walked slowly away, the Marquis, half-stunned by his own violence, pacing with heavy tread between his two companions. They neither of them spoke, but led him in silence along the terrace and the sunny street to the convent close by, where the confraternity was assembling to convey the corpse to its burial.

PART II.

WHEN my familiar critic H. read a little history I wrote some short time ago, she said she did not think the story properly finished. She wanted to know what happened afterwards. 'How did it all come straight?' said she, shutting up her book, and bringing out her knitting-pins.

I told her that I was surprised that, with all her experience of life, she should imagine that things *did* come straight, or that people ever extricated themselves from their difficulties.

'But *something* happened,' H. repeated. 'Did Barbi come back? Did Fanny relent and marry him, after all, notwithstanding his two dead wives and Lucetta's reproachful letters?'

I answered gravely that the point of my story was, that they did *not* marry. Most stories end with a wedding, the climax of mine was, that the wedding was happily broken off. H., who was in a teasing mood, laughed and said, 'that if this was my ideal of perfect happiness, there seemed to be no lack of it in the world.'

Then she asked me whether Barbi would really have killed Fanny if she had married him.

'It was not a real actual death with which Fanny was threatened by a marriage with Barbi,' I said, 'but rather a slow extinction of life. Do you remember Mr. K. telling us that a man bored him one day until he fainted, so much had his heart's action been lowered? Don't you know, H., how the society of some people seems actually to absorb what little vitality we have left of our own, while that of others does give us new life?' and as I spoke I could not help thinking how much of my own life's life had come to me from the good friend and faithful companion of all these long years.

The very loops of her cap-strings seemed to suit me, the gentle clicket of her knitting-needles, and the soft trick of her velvet shoe, as it beat time unconsciously to the motion of her hands.

'All the same; I am not quite certain,' H. said absently, knitting in a fresh skein of wool; 'if an unhappy marriage is not better than none at all, and if your Fanny might not have made something out of the Marquis? Are you *quite* sure Barbi never came back for her?'

'Quite sure,' said I; 'Fanny is in England now, and I saw the Marquis when I was last at Rome. My friend, Mr. Phidias, pointed him out to me.'

'Unmarried?' asked persistent H.

'Unmarried,' I answered drily.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. DE TRAVERS' DREAMS.

WHEN the brothers appear galloping into the celebrated Bluebeard's castle just in the nick of time, to rescue their sister from the hands of that ferocious noble, the history finishes off, but we don't know what happens to any of them, except that Fatima is saved from her horrible husband; the brothers cut off his head with his own scimitar. No one makes any remark; there is not even an inquest. The executioners peacefully succeed (such is the state of the law in fairy tales) to a share of the rich inheritance, and we take it for granted that Fatima gives a decent burial to the poor wives who have been hanging up so long in the cupboard. One question in particular will never be answered. What did the *first* wife see when she peeped in with the key?

I left off somewhat abruptly, where the two brothers of the confraternity came in by a garden staircase, and delivered the Marchese's frightened betrothed from his violence. It was true she deserved a scolding for reading his old love-letters; but Barbi's fury was out of all bounds.

He was a man of strong words and fierce deeds, and at the same time morbidly and superstitiously remorseful. He had abandoned Lucetta, and she had died broken-hearted by her own deed, to save him from crime, and he was her murderer. The church had pardoned an offence which he himself could not forgive. He clung to the church in desperate agony, as a falling man clings to the ledge which alone sustains him. For a time Fanny's little hand had seemed to this forlorn and miserable man to be one new link to life, and now this frail support had failed him. He had thought that she loved him. It was all a dream and a temptation—a deception of Satan to lure him away from the only repentance by which he could ever obliterate the past. The priests had warned him. Now he felt that they had been wise in their warnings. How dared he think of love any more, of home life, and sweet home ties?

The bell had ceased tolling, of which the sound had drowned Anne's voice when she called for help, and Barbi was walking in a funeral procession, dressed in his blue silk gown, with a taper in his hand, while the two sisters still remained as he had left them, clinging to each other; they could not realise what had happened, they could not understand that they were free—free to go where they would, to search cabinets, to unlock cupboard-doors, to marry, to dance, to sing, to weep as they liked. Barbi would never trouble them more.

'Come,' said Fanny, taking Anne's cold hand in hers. Anne looked at her sister in wonder. Fanny wiped her eyes, and they began to shine then and there; her cheeks began to burn; she walked erect and undismayed through the great rooms, at which she was perhaps looking for the last time, out upon the cool marble stairs, where purer air seemed to blow and purer lights to play. Fanny looked transformed. 'Free!' she said to herself, drawing a long breath. She had not known until now how she had dreaded the thought of a life spent with that man. The thought had seemed to choke and freeze and weigh her down, though she had never owned it; she might be miserable, she might be lonely some day, but she was free. This feeling of liberty seemed to give her a courage and strength that she had never felt before; she feared no one any more—not her mother—not even poor Barbi in all his mad rage and frantic agony. What a strange man—what a strange episode in her life. Ah! she should be always ashamed for herself and sorry for him.

Anne looked at her sister in admiration. She hardly knew what had happened, whether it was all broken off, whether Barbi was really gone, whether Fanny would have strength to keep to her determination when she came to face her mother's reproaches. Anne need not have been afraid.

Old Olympia, coming and going in the outer sala, had thrown a shawl over Fanny's bird-cage to still the bird's

shrill clamour; the shutters were closed, and in a cool corner of the room the old woman was setting a five-o'clock tea-table, with shining cups and basons, and some of Fanny's favourite cakes. It was a sunny, tiring, sweet afternoon, which seemed burning on to many soft hums and tones—cooings of doves and sleeping voices that were echoing and calling in the street outside. Light and sound came shaded and softened through the closed shutters. In England we should respect Mrs. de Travers' big room, with the domed ceiling and frescoed Cupids and goddesses, even though it looked bare and somewhat dismantled. In Italy people thought it small for summer heats, but comfortably furnished. Olympia, whose own home was hidden in an archway opening on the street, would discourse to her children of the magnificence of the family she served. To-day she stood on the window-ledge, as she peeped out through the half-closed shutter: outside was a drone of distant hammers, and a great gold silence—the light was falling on the sun-blinds of the opposite windows, on the balconies, courts, and tenements; all round about spread the city encircled by hills, with great St. Peter's rearing in the midst. Old Olympia had only looked out to see if her neighbour, the washerwoman, had hung out her clothes to dry, and then, being satisfied, came back to her work again.

'Thé, thé, sempre thé,' thought the old donna; 'they ruin their digestions, the English rich; the lady mother

is asleep, but the young ones will come in and call for thé, thé. We who labour have to wait upon them, while they rest like the saints in Heaven. Hé—she snores.' Olympia then went, cautiously paddling in her slippers, to look at the lady mother, sunk back in the big chair in the little inner room, resting after the fatigue of a drive in the Marquis's carriage, and the excitement of some news she had found when she came in, in a letter from Tourniquet Castle. There she rested, flushed and oblivious, or lazily awakening only to go to sleep again. Were not her labours nearly over? had not her many sacrifices been repaid at last? Merit was always recognised sooner or later; and whatever people might say, she began to think this world very comfortable after all, and the weather delicious. She held the letter loosely in her hand to read to the girls when they came in.

Does not one gleam of luck reflect another? Here was a piece of crowning news, written in Lord Tortillion's trembling old writing—a piece of news that only a few weeks ago would have transported Mrs. de Travers into a seventy-seventh heaven, but which now seemed to be barely her right, and a part of all the rest. What was an extra 300*l.* a year to the dazzling vistas opening out on every side? 'Wretched old man!' thought Mrs. de Travers, 'at last he condescends to recognise his own flesh and blood. My child's creditable choice, my own long sacrifices, have brought him to a more Christian state of

mind. It will be a mercy if he is taken before he has time to harden once more.' Lord Tortillion had altered his will, and left an annuity of 300*l.* a year between the three—so he sent word. He was always altering his will; but this time he was also seriously ill. 'I shall send to the doctor,' thought Mrs. de Travers, 'and *insist* upon being told the real state of the case. He is quite capable of shamming dead on purpose to vex me. *Nothing* will induce me to put off Fanny's wedding one hour.'

By degrees Mrs. de Travers' comfortable world seemed to fade into phantoms and visions: alternate festoons of orange-flowers and pink tape were adorning her light slumbers. Sometimes she awoke just enough to listen for a moment to the tolling of the bell from the Capuchin church close by, and when that ceased, to the chirps of Fanny's bird in its cage; or she would open her eyes and sleepily watch old Olympia coming and going at her work. Sometimes the little Cupids in the ceiling would start fluttering for a moment out of their places. She could hear the tranquil drone of the insects, the distant cooing of the doves. It was a pity to sleep to such sweet music; but Mrs. de Travers, dreaming off into deeper depths, would lose her thread again, and wander away, through vague and shining realms, from the realities around her.

'She is of those who sleep,' thinks Olympia; 'I am of those who watch. I had no chance when I was born—no,

nor ever shall, while that good-for-nothing Domenico leaves me to work and slave for all the house. Now all is ready. Here are more rich gifts for the Signorina! The mamma sleeps as sleep the happy. Ah, she is well contented, the lady mother!'

Presently it seemed to Mrs. de Travers that there was a murmuring of voices somewhere, reaching even to dreamland, and that the two draped statues of Ceres and Proserpine from the marble staircase came and stood before her in their white stone garments; and then she thought that Ceres sighed deeply and said, 'Who shall tell her?' and that Proserpine flung her wreath to the ground, and answered, 'I will!' and Proserpine's wreath bloomed into myrtle and orange-flower, and from Ceres' cornucopia flowed a stream of gold waving and shining and stamped with Lord Tortillion's profile, and everything was delightful and splendid. It was one of the last, and thinnest, and sunniest of the dreams of poor Maria de Travers' life; and awakening at last, with a start, she saw —not gold, not orange-blossoms, not goddesses with flowing garments—but her Anne and Fanny standing before her, silent, with looks so strange and grave that the mother's heart began to fail, and the news she had meant to tell them died away on her lips. Even old Olympia had noticed their curious suppressed excitement, and she stood transfixed in the doorway with her pile of teacups, waiting to see what would happen. Anne's hair had

fallen loose and was hanging all wildly over her shoulders. Fanny looked calmer, but there was a peculiar set expression in her face. The Cupids might fly back to their homes in the frescoed ceiling, the orange-flowers vanish into air, and the diamonds crumble into their primeval coal; Mrs. de Travers awakened from her dream to hear her daughter's voice, saying, 'Mamma, I have broken off my engagement; I am not going to be married.'

'Oh, mamma, it has been so terrible!' said Anne.

'Terrible! What is terrible?' and poor Mrs. de Travers turned from one to the other. 'What is it?' she says, awakening to some catastrophe as she meets her daughters' looks.

Anne spoke—

'Oh, mamma, he would have killed her! His first wife died of grief. Thank Heaven, it was time to save her;' and poor Anne put her arms round her sister.

'Anne—wretched, wretched girl—how dare you?' cried the mother, in a hoarse, choking voice. 'How do *you* dare to say such wicked things?'

'But the things are true, mamma,' said Fanny, speaking very quietly; 'he owns to them. I have broken off my engagement. It is my doing, not Anne's. I had rather die than marry him now. Mamma, I hate him!' cried the girl, suddenly changing her voice, 'and I hate myself; oh, I hate myself!' and she burst out sobbing, and hid her face on her sister's shoulder.

'I—I don't understand. You should not say such things,' said Mrs. de Travers, looking up at Anne, and trying to smile in a vacant, frightened way. 'Anne, your sister is a little nervous, and overdone, take her to her room. Here, quick, for goodness' sake! some one is coming, it may be him.'

The door-bell had rung a minute before, and Olympia shuffled off. The Signoria must settle its own affairs, there was some one ringing, that was her business. And while Fanny was crying, and her mother realising the truth as well as she could, Olympia came back ushering in Lady Castleairs. 'That great tall one,' she announced at the door, while Lady Castleairs' plumed head was already appearing over her scraggy old top-knot.

Poor Mrs. de Travers' early training stood her in some good stead as she turned to receive her visitor. She could have cried too, boxed Fanny's ears, gone into hysterics. But she shook hands politely with her visitor, and invited her to be seated.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. DE TRAVERS AWAKE.

As for Anne and Fanny, they had already disappeared: little Fanny was lying, stretched out upon her bed, trembling and quivering now that all was over. Trembling and miserable, and yet, as I have said, relieved beyond the power of words to express. Already she had wondered how she should feel going back to her old self again, her work and her shabby gown and makeshifts, to the dreary, weary, blessed old round that she had so hated only a month before, and yet Fanny felt now as if it could never be dreadful again as it was before. She herself was different, and she had found out that to every human being is granted a certain will and liberty of action and feeling which should be as much part of life as faith or affection itself. Happy those who find this out in time, and who have courage and constancy to keep to the clue. Anne sat by her sister's bed, holding her hand close in hers, and feeling as if Fanny had been given back to her from the grave.

'Dear Anne,' said Fanny, looking into her sister's

face, 'you must be happier than I have been: you deserve to be happy, I didn't. Don't look so sad; I'm being good, now,' said Fanny, 'but, Anne, I can't go on as I did before: mamma can't expect it.'

'Poor mamma!' said Anne, 'she is so disappointed.'

('Yes, these are the emeralds,' they heard their mother saying in the next room.

And then Lady Castleairs: 'Very pretty.')

Miss de Travers hardly knew at that moment whether it was all over or not: whether Barbi was a murderer or not: what had happened: how everything had come about: she seemed still to hear the furious blows striking on the door: the toll of the bell without: her own frightened cries for help. Would Lady Castleairs never go? why did she sit there when they were all in such bewilderment?

Poor Mrs. de Travers was going through with her rôle —smiling dry smiles, forcing herself to listen, pinching her fingers over the clasps, and displaying Fanny's treasures. 'No, Lady Castleairs should suspect nothing,' she said to herself, while she could scarcely contain her impatience so as to answer her friend's numerous questions, or to display all the tokens of those precious possessions which seemed already so nearly slipping out of her grasp.

Rome is the city of beautiful jewels. They are everywhere; in the earth, in the sky, in the light, in the flowers of the Campagna, in gold, and the cunning of the

worker. Here were great, cool, sparkling stones,—emeralds and diamonds, such as we scarcely dream of over here. White pearl-drops lie shining on their velvet cushions,—opals reflecting the tenderest lights.

'Did he send all these? he must be immensely rich,' said Lady Castleairs, in her grating voice.

'The opals came this morning,' said Mrs. de Travers. 'He has been most splendid in his attentions.' And then for an instant the emeralds and the diamonds seemed to rise up and swim before her, and her heart sank down, down, in a sort of despair, as she thought of this splendid tide which might be even now already flowing away and leaving but a wreck behind.

'One hears all sorts of stories,' said Lady Castleairs, 'but one don't believe more than half. Of course you know that he is entirely under the dominion of the priests. (What very fine coral!) I scarcely like to repeat all I hear,' Lady Castleairs went on to say, 'but I think it is friendly to give a hint.'

Poor Mrs. de Travers, from her rack, with another smile, said that she was not afraid to hear anything that Lady Castleairs wished to mention. The Marquis was one in whom she had so entire a confidence that no scandal could affect her opinion of him.

'Perhaps that is as well,' said the Viscountess. 'What day have you determined on for the wedding?' And she fixed her two eyes so sternly upon the anxious face oppo-

site, that poor Mrs. de Travers gave a nervous start, lost her presence of mind for a moment, and faltered something about 'lawyers—slight uncertainty—Lord Tortillion's state of health.'

'You are quite right to take this view of the question,' said Lady Castleairs; 'and, of course, I shall only say what you wish me to repeat on the subject. But if there should be any difficulty, and if you would rather not come to Princess Appoloni's to-night, or to the Melvilles' breakfast next week, I will make your excuses with pleasure.'

'Dear me! the girls would not miss the reception for anything,' cried Mrs. de Travers. 'And as for the picnic, we start before post-time. If there is bad news of Lord Tortillion, we should not know it till our return.'

How she knew it, poor Mrs. de Travers could hardly have told you, but as her tormentor left her, she felt that it was already spread half over the town that the marriage was broken off. What did it mean? How could it have happened? She tried to collect her thoughts. She must be firm with Barbi—yielding to Fanny. Above all, she must know what had passed.

When, some twenty minutes later, Mrs. de Travers, after an agitating interview with her daughter, rushed down to the great door of Barbi's apartments below and pulled the bell, old Angelo opened in his usual sleepy way. The Marquis had come home and gone out again,

he said. He had met the English lady on the stairs. He was coming back.

Mrs. de Travers left a peremptory message that he should come up and speak to her when he returned. But he did not come. And then six o'clock struck, but no Marquis.

Fanny still lay on her bed in the darkened room. Anne went from her sister to her mother, trying in vain to comfort them. But Mrs. de Travers would not be comforted. Then the sun set in imperial pomp beyond the city plains, with strange and beautiful wreaths of vapour; the bells began to toll, deep and sweet-mouthed; the lights shook, and changed, and brightened, and began to die; the soft thrill of evening once more spread from populous street to street, from piazza to piazza; the Tiber flowed gold between its banks.

Olympia and Anne went from window to window unclosing the shutters and letting in the light.

'He must be here directly,' cried Mrs. de Travers from the inner room. 'Olympia, go and domandy if the Marchese is not coming up.'

Anne was standing at the passage window when her mother gave the order. She was looking down listless into the court-yard at the back of the house, where a crumbling gateway of classic proportions led to a great closed wing of the palace. Beyond the gate an entrance led into the wide and stately garden, that lay already

darkening and mystical, while the distant hills and strings of cedars glowed in the evening fires. The doors of the closed gateway opened, and some one came out of the closed wing and walked quickly away straight across the yard, without looking to the right or the left.

'Mamma,' said Anne, 'the Marquis will not come. I have just seen him cross the yard.'

'I believe, Anne, you do it on purpose,' cried her mother, exasperated.

Mrs. de Travers was somewhat pacified when Angelo brought a hasty little pencil-note.

'I cannot come up, being late for those who expect me. I shall be at the Palazzo Appoloni to-night.—O. B.'

CHAPTER X.

A ROMAN PARTY.

Palazzo Appoloni was like other old Italian palaces:—First, a court-yard for the horses' hoofs, then a great staircase for the echoes, leading to great halls, to solemn vaults, opening from one to another, to servants' waiting-rooms, to ante-rooms with vast floors of brick, to galleries travelling on into ball-rooms. There was space for a whole London street beneath the roof of the old palace; but the street might change and fall away, while the stately family home stood firm, scarcely touched by time. On the walls hung warriors and cardinals and statesmen, grand ladies, dark-eyed and silent, with jewels of great worth; a bygone pomp of past centuries and past beauty and valour; down below the same beautiful jewels, and the ladies and warriors of to-day, were passing, alive but silent, through the dim doorways. The crowd pressed on through a grandiose sort of twilight: all was dim and stately. The mighty rocks of walls seemed to absorb the light from the wax-candles, the tapestry scarcely covered their stony massiveness. Here and there in a side-room

stood a salver piled with sugar and cakes and crystallised fruit heaped up, but no one seemed to touch the sweetmeats. Besides the many pictures, some worthless, some priceless, there were statues and fragments of statues and marble columns, there were ancient suits of armour hanging up high overhead, and faded trophies of victory: arms that would clash no more, spears that would wound never again.

The beautiful dark-eyed Princess C. goes by in velvet and pearls: she was married at sixteen to a man of fifty, ill-humoured and cruel and niggardly, so people say. How sweet she looks, how gentle and patient. A cardinal passes, attended by his acolyte; two or three grand-looking young Romans follow; then comes a pale wizened woman, with diamonds like pigeons' eggs: she is one of the Guasta Cambiales. Then comes a foreigner married to the Duke of Mangiascudi: she has a homely, commonplace air among these goddesses stepping down from Olympus—crowned and stately. Who is that in a corner half hidden by a trophy of arms and rusty cuirasses? a pale face shrinking away behind the rusty helm? a shivering white dress and two impatient hands working nervously together? It is only little Fanny, who had given in to her mother's persistence, hating herself all the while for coming, for allowing herself to be dressed and brought forth from the dark room where she had been hiding all these hours. She had come, somewhat to Mrs. de

Travers' surprise, suddenly yielding to the entreaties with which she had been plied. When she heard that the Marchese was to be there she had come, not because she was weak, but because, for all her weakness, she felt herself strong. She wanted to see Barbi once more, alone and yet in company; she wanted to tell him one last time that she had wronged him too, and had no right to judge him. This was the end of her long hours of thought. Yes, she hated him, but at the same time she felt some immense pity for the poor unhappy wretch, for whom she at least had shown but little mercy, and she longed to tell him so. Fanny, watching the solemn company from her dim corner, looked almost as pale as her own white dress. She had grown very small and thin suddenly; some intangible change had passed over her. Her dark hair was pinned back, she had no jewels, only this white dress.

Lady Castleairs came up and established herself by her countrywoman. 'I met the Marchese as I was leaving your door: I daresay he told you,' said she. 'How ill the poor man is looking.'

'Oh, yes,' said Mrs. de Travers, unblushingly. Then she went on: 'I am expecting him every minute; he promised to come after his dinner.'

'And did he give you my message?' said the Viscountess. 'The Melvilles declare they *must* have him. They are two gentlemen short already. He pretends he is engaged.'

Fanny gave a new little shiver when she heard Barbi's name; but instinctively, even as she listened, she withdrew from the crowd into the dark corner.

Anne stood a few yards before her, shielding her as best she could, parrying questions, intercepting forward people. The rumour—so it often happens—of the broken engagement had spread long before the fact itself existed. Mrs. de Travers, beaming lambent and gorgeous, stood bowing affably in her flower-crowned wig, the very image of prosperity and success. People looking at her began to unwhisper the whispers. Fanny cared not what they said: she watched the doors anxiously and listened indifferently to the beginnings and ends of odd sentences as they reached her ears—the scattered echoes of life. She often heard Barbi's name and sometimes her own in the confusion of sounds. About ten o'clock some young men came in who had been dining at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. They were laughing at the dinner. 'It was most preposterous,' said one. 'Barbi gave it, and he insisted upon ordering every dish upon the carte.'

'He must have chosen his wine the same way,' said another: 'we were served alphabetically.'

'How should he know anything about wine,' said the first, 'except, perhaps, his native pigskins? Is the dinner over? Did he come away too?'

'I don't know,' said the other. 'I left him alternately biting his nails and making the sign of the cross.'

'Hush, there he is,' said the first, pointing back over his shoulder.

Fanny's heart began to beat very quick; she hardly dared look. She thought of the first time she had met Barbi, with his great shining star, and how he had stopped and spoken to her,—poor little neglected creature that she was; and now, now she did not know what to think or what to feel.

A priest, who had come in the suite of one of the cardinals, had been quietly examining the arms of which the trophy was composed. He overheard what the young Romans said, and he turned and went in the direction in which they had pointed, his flying robe swelling as he flitted along.

'The Marchese! Did anyone say he was come?' cried Mrs. de Travers, bustling off in the same direction.

Fanny could hardly stand, but leant against the old pile, looking white and pale and ready to faint. Anne watched her anxiously.

'I must be going,' said Lady Castleairs. 'I am always up early. And remember the Melvilles on Wednesday.'

Fanny came out of her corner as Lady Castleairs rustled off, bowing to one person and another. Anne, too, advanced a few steps; and through a doorway, half draped by a curtain, the sisters saw the person they were expecting coming along, with his great star, looking about

and evidently seeking them. Mrs. de Travers saw him too, and was excitedly rushing up to meet him, when a departing cardinal's procession came up the middle of the room. The crowd made way, great ladies curtseyed low. Mrs. de Travers, who prided herself upon her devout adherence to the Church, greatly against her will stopped short to perform a profound genuflection. When she arose the people had pushed on in front of her, the procession was passing on, she could not see Barbi for an instant. Had he vanished, star and all? Anne and Fanny saw him as he passed close beside them. He did not see them. The cardinal was speaking to him, and the priest who had been waiting so long was walking between him and them.

The next minute Mrs. de Travers returned with a changing face. 'Come with me. Now, Fanny, be quick,' she said sharply. 'He is going: a priest called him away just as he was hurrying up to speak to me. But we will follow. Quick, I tell you.'

Fanny, hardly knowing what she was doing, followed her mother as she was bid on through the crowd, along the long ball-room, across the great inner hall (where also stood a raised throne like Barbi's). 'He must have passed this way,' said Mrs. de Travers, courageously. She did not know that there was a private entrance for the cardinal specially opened. Then they came out into the great outer hall, where the servants were sitting in rows,

waiting with cloaks and with wrappers, while others stood ready to call the great ladies' carriages.

'Are you going?' said Lady Castleairs, coming up with a man behind her who was carrying her rugs. 'I know you have no carriage? Shall I take you home?'

'We are—we are going back to the saloon,' said Mrs. de Travers, looking round quite desperate. She seemed to see the fold of a priest's skirt disappearing among the crowd of waiting servants. 'Barbi lent us the carriage, and I am looking for him.'

'Mamma, I want to go,' said a faint voice. 'I am so tired.' All Fanny's courage seemed suddenly failing. 'Will you take me?' she asked Lady Castleairs. 'I am not well.'

'Certainly. Good-night, Mrs. de Travers. Very odd of the Marquis.' And downstairs the lady hurried, followed by her little companion.

Fortunately for Fanny the Viscountess went fast asleep immediately she got into her carriage, and the drive was a short one through the moonlit streets. The horses stopped at the gates of the Palazzo Barbi, and Fanny jumped out into the great silver sea that was flooding the court. 'We won't drive in,' said Lady Castleairs, waking up suddenly: 'it is such an awkward turn. Good-night. What a beautiful night!' And the carriage started off once more with Lady Castleairs' head still out of window.

Fanny looked up at the flashing sky that flooded its light upon the old palace with its many windows: the stream came flowing through the dark piles and columns that led to the garden beyond. She started as a figure of a man suddenly appeared from the corner of the gateway, holding out his hand—a figure in rippling moonlit rags, with a shaggy beard—and asking for alms. She shook her head, for she had no money to give, and, frightened by his persistence, hurried across the court, and ran up the great staircase, springing up two and three of the marble steps at a time. The footpaces followed her a little way, and then stopped short and died away; and Fanny, with a beating heart, seized the chain of the bell, and rang for old Olympia to open to her, feeling safe at last at their own door, and thankful to get home to the cool darkness, to lie quietly stretched out on her bed, and cry over the wretchedness of the day. Not the less wretched that she had not seen Barbi as she had hoped to do. She waited a minute, and then she rang again a long peal, which set one bell jangling upon another. The steps had ceased, but she was not sure but that the man might return. Why did not Olympia awaken? A third and a fourth time she rang, and then raised the heavy knocker and struck a loud thundering blow, that seemed to echo from wall to wall down the great marble quarry of steps and statues and arches. Still there was no answer. With a sudden chill Fanny began to realise that Olympia, instead

of waiting as usual, had gone home for the night. For an hour or more she should have to wait there all alone until the others returned with the key. Her heart sank at the prospect. She was alone, in her thin white evening dress. Only a day before a Neapolitan deputy had been murdered on his own staircase. It is said that the Roman staircases are less safe than the streets. All night long the great gates stand open; thieves and tramps resort to them for the night, and homeless dogs and people take refuge there. A few weeks ago Fanny would have waited without fear, but her nerve was somewhat shaken by all she had gone through. Minutes seemed unending, time seemed leaden, her heart beat on. Then the clocks of the city came striking and echoing chill against the dome of marble. Fanny thought of the day that was past; its sounds and sights came pursuing her like the ghosts of a wild pack of flying hounds. She shivered, and hid her face in her hands.

A week or two ago she could scarcely tell what was fact, what was hope, in her dazzling schemes. Now to-night, in this still moonlight, she had seemed to see clear at last: a veil had fallen from her eyes. The moonlight came shifting and playing so strangely, that it seemed to Fanny as if the statues were trembling and coming to life. Was something stirring in the shadow? How cold she was! Every minute seemed to add to her terrors. In the midst of it all, the thought of old Angelo in his

lodge below occurred to her with a ray of comfort. Perhaps he was there, close at hand. He might have a key, or he would let her sit in his lodge until they came home. Why had she not remembered this before? Summoning her courage, Fanny flitted down again, flying along the many steps, expecting a figure at every landing to start out and bar her way.

No one moved, and once more she stood outside in the starlight of the court. Still and flashing and lovely, and so silent that she could hear the soft frôle of her muslins upon the stone. The moonlight filled the court. It lighted up the ancient marbles of the palace; it seemed to meet the starlight in a silver radiance. Something in the quietness and beauty of the hour gave her new strength and courage. But the lodge was empty, and as silent as the palace. Angelo was out, perhaps tempted by this lovely night. Fanny looked in through the uncurtained window. He had left his lamp against his return. Its light was burning red and earthly in the silver.

CHAPTER XI.

FANNY AND BARBI.

FROM under the archway and pillars that led from the court to the gardens, the moonlight came in alternate white radiance and black shadow. It was all unearthly and beautiful and terrible at once. She could see the stars flash between the columns. Surely some one passed from one shadow to another. Was that beggar still there, hiding under the arches? She could bear it no longer, and fitfully wandered across the court into the street outside the gates, and stood looking at the stars and listening for the wheels of the carriage. A distant figure was kneeling at a shrine at a street corner, and this somewhat reassured her. Again the quarters struck and came clanging from steeple after steeple. Then the sound reached her of some voices shouting a tipsy chorus from a side-street, and it struck her how strange it would seem to anyone to see her standing there, with her bare head, with flowers, and in her white dress and shoes in the rippling moonlight; and once more she retreated as a

group of men appeared, shouting and straggling as they tramped along.

Their voices seemed to break the mystical silence, and fill it with a strange melancholy jar of revelry. One of them saw her, and seemed to point her out, another gave a shout and came reeling towards the gate. Once more she turned frightened towards the house. She flew across the court and up the marble stairs a second time, sinking down breathless on a step, with pulses throbbing. Time was not time, but terror, as she waited, expecting every horror of an excited imagination; and then once more she distinctly heard the sound of steps falling upon the marble, and mounting deliberately flight by flight. Fanny pressed her hand against her heart. She was sick with fright; rising dark against the moonlight, came the shadow of a man, strange and distorted by the slanting rays; but suddenly, in a moment, she knew it. It was Barbi—Barbi, whom she had looked for in vain that evening.

Barbi saw her plain in the moonlight, and came forward with a strange scared face. It may have been the silver moonlight that made him look so pale.

'Fanny,' he said, in an awe-struck voice, 'speak!' And as she faintly smiled and tried to utter—'It is you. I saw you.'—'Yes, it is me,' said Fanny, speaking quietly now. 'I expect my mother every instant. I am shut out.'

'Poor child! you were frightened. Was it thus my prayers were answered? I wanted to see you,' said Barbi, 'and I prayed at the Madonna's shrine.' Then his voice faltered. 'Good-by, little Fanny,' he said. 'We must part. It is fate.'

'Where are you going?' asked the girl. 'I also wanted to see you. I want to tell you that I too have been to blame,' she said, with much feeling. 'I have deceived you and wronged you. I shall never forgive myself. I did not love you as . . .'

'Ah, hush! do not tell me that,' Barbi said gently, speaking as he had never spoken before. 'I whose wrongs . . .'

'What do you mean? *You* have no wrongs against *me*,' Fanny went on, passionately; 'none—none!' And she shivered as she spoke, because she was so sad—because his face looked so terrible and pale. It was a ghost there before her, not a living man.

'I was kneeling in the street, and I looked up and saw you,' said Barbi; 'but I thought it was a vision of my brain. You were sent to my help. There is still pity for my weakness. Fanny, will you do me a service? Will you do what I have not courage to do for myself?' His voice sank into a whisper. 'Will you burn the letters and clothes that you discovered? Burn them, burn them, unless the tears of repentance I have shed put out the fire,'

he said wildly. And he raised his hand and held out the keys.

She had no need to ask what they were. Putting her hand on his, and holding him back for an instant, she asked, 'Where are you going?'

He looked at her with a frightened, fierce look, and shook off her gentle touch.

'That is nothing to you,' he said. Then softening again, 'Good-by, my little Fanny; I trust you now. They are coming. Do not tell them of this. See, this is the key of the garden stairs, by which you must enter. You will have nothing more to fear. Think of me sometimes and pray for my rest.'

He was looking at her still. He was gone.

Fanny stood dazed and bewildered. The moon had travelled round to her dark landing-place, and she stood up, illumined and gentle and changed. She heard horses' feet and carriage-wheels and voices down below; then the flash of a lantern came darting up the stairs, and her mother and sister rustling wearily home, escorted by old Angelo.

Fanny's brain reeled; she just heard old Angelo's croaking tones saying, 'Eh, Signorina, let me come. It is not well for ladies like you to be alone on these stairs at night.'

'Anne!' cried Fanny, stretching out her arms.

'Fanny!' cried her horrified sister and mother at once.

Anne sprang forward and caught her sister in her arms just as she had fainted away.

Barbi, meanwhile, walked across the court and the street, and so went on through the quiet places until he came to the great swinging doors of the Capucin convent, where the monks were assembled at matins, although the night was at its darkest, and the morning sun shining upon distant seas. The chapel was lighted up, their voices seemed to swell to meet the Marchese as he opened the doors. He stopped for an instant—he looked back once—he could see the upper windows of his own palace as it reared black against the solemn sky. There was a light still burning in one of the upper windows, and with all the strength of his strange sad, mad heart he sent a longing blessing and farewell to the little maiden safe sheltered under that roof. Then he walked to his accustomed place and fell down upon his knees, and knelt motionless, the only stranger at this solemn service, coming before dawn in the darkness of the night.

When it was over he rose with the rest, and advancing towards the altar, of which the lights were beginning to be extinguished, he asked to speak to the prior, and passed in with the rest through the side-door of the altar.

All that night Fanny slept and woke, and slept and

dreamt again; sometimes she cried out in her sleep, and then Anne was by her side in a moment, bending over and comforting her. She had whispered to Anne, and told her everything in the darkness. 'He must be going away; you won't see him again; we must burn his papers before his absence is known,' Anne had said.

'I must go,' Fanny said, 'alone, as he wished it. Oh, Anne, how shall we ever live through to-morrow?'

Very early in the morning Fanny was wide awake; Anne, tired out, was breathing softly in her bed. But Fanny could not sleep, she could not rest. She jumped out of bed, and pattered with bare feet across the marble floor to the great unshuttered window, through which a clear morning light was breaking. What a strange sight was this? Rome lay flooded in a floating sea of mist at her feet. Domes and chimneys, steeples, convent belfries rising above the level of this dazzling lake, looking like the masts and sails of a mighty fleet floating on the surface of the waters. The great arc of St. Peter's dominated over all—the sky was clear and light in the east.

Down in the mist lay hidden as yet all the life and sound, all the cares and sights of the coming day. The loneliness of their hill-top, its peace and tranquillity, seemed to calm her excited nerves. Now she saw Barbi, as he was, half-reasonable, half-educated, with violent uncontrollable impulses, and yet with a certain humility

and singleness of heart that made her ashamed. She thought how she had nearly sold herself and deceived him, for what? for a cypher on her pocket-handkerchief, for a string of beads round her neck, for a daily drive in the great swinging coach, from which (the door with the heraldic lion once closed upon her) there would be no escape until the day when she might have taken her place in the sumptuous family vault. What hope could there have been for her?—and, after all, hope counts for something in the sum of daily life. Suddenly brightening and sweetening came the recollection of a hundred girlish uncounted dreams of possible sympathy and happiness, and then poor foolish Fanny burst out crying at the thought. 'Not for me—never for me!' she said in her tears. 'I deserve nothing. Oh, that I knew he was safe!'

When a girl who has taken a great decision in life suddenly comes face to face with familiar things again, they seem to take new meanings and imports: vivid possibilities come flashing into the mind in juxtaposition: no wonder if the actual facts are distorted for a time; she can scarcely tell what is fact and what is hope in her dazzling schemes. The past itself seems lighted up by the future.

So it had been with Fanny; and now she stood alone, once more free and poor, leaning against the old embrasure, trying to see her way through the mists.

Mrs. de Travers breakfasted in her room. She was

very angry to find the girls absent when she came out in her dressing-gown to talk things over. Black lines were under her eyes, and black words, alas! in her mouth. She relieved her feelings by a long letter to Barbi. 'Why had he broken his promise the night before? Why had he left without speaking to her? She did not write to blame *him*, and therefore she did not spare Fanny, who was no daughter of hers if she did not appreciate his noble, generous qualities. She would candidly confess that her child's conduct had been thoughtless in the extreme; but Fanny was full of grief and repentance; she had fainted the night before on her return,' and so on, and so on; with a postscript mentioning Lord Tortillion's handsome intentions. 'I know you too well, my dear son-in-law (you *must* let me call you so),' said Mrs. de Travers, 'to imagine you will care for the money; but the intentions of that aged man will touch your generous nature.' Olympia was called to carry this epistle down, and bring back an immediate answer.

'Quick, give me my seal from the desk, and the wax and the taper,' says her mistress. 'The silver taper, Olympia, and the matches off the chimney-piece.'

Olympia went fumbling about.

'I know not,' she said; 'there is nothing. Hé! what would the gracious mistress? She asks that which is not. Holy Virgin, it is not!'

Mrs. de Travers rose herself to look. The taper was gone! She nearly boxed Olympia's ears. She had stolen it! She was a thief! and she should be given to the police! Anne and Fanny came in for their share when they returned.

'I took the taper, mamma,' said Fanny, sadly; 'do not blame Olympia.' And she went into her room, and brought it back, with the matches.

'The candle is burnt away! What have you been doing?' shrieks poor Mrs. de Travers.

Fanny only sighed; but she did not answer her mother.

'Fanny, am I not to be answered? Something *must* be done!' Mrs. de Travers cried.

'I have done all I had to do, mamma,' Fanny said, looking her mother steadily in the face: she was sorry for her, but she feared her no longer.

We have all lived these long interminable days of dull expectation and unacknowledged anxiety, when there is nothing to do, nothing to say, nothing to feel, except weariness and distaste. Mrs. de Travers' letter came back to her unopened. The Marchese was absent: he had not come home: he was supposed to have been called away unexpectedly to Florence. His chaplain called that afternoon to ask if letters had been received for him; he did not seem surprised at his absence. He also wanted some papers Barbi had left behind. The Lord Marquis must have returned the previous night before starting on his

journey; there were marks of burnt papers in the grate and the droppings of a taper; no one else could have got in, for even Angelo no longer possessed the garden key, and had given it up to the Marquis.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CAPUCINS' MASS.

THE Melvilles' picnic, which had been put off for one reason and another, was finally fixed for one day about a fortnight after the events I have described.

People afterwards said what bad taste Mrs. de Travers showed in sending her daughters. She should, in common decency, have kept them quietly at home. Their grandfather dying, Fanny's lover vanished no one knew whither, this was no time for excitement and dissipations. Dissipation! poor little Fanny looked on with such a piteous face, such wistful eyes, that those who met their glance forgave her anything. Henry Melville told his mother afterwards that she would have more than forgiven Anne if she had known from what a home of persecution she had persuaded Fanny to escape for an hour or two. Mrs. de Travers' ill-humour, acting upon a torpid organisation, had stirred up strange ailments. She was scarcely accountable for her violence. She thought herself the most injured and ill-used of women: it was a martyrdom she inflicted on the two poor girls, upon Fanny especially, who with

bitter self-reproach told herself that she was partly the cause of her mother's distress. And yet if it were all to do over again she would do it.

'Good gracious, Anne, Fanny, what have you been doing to yourselves?' cried their mother as the two young ladies came in ready dressed for their expedition. The girls had put on their shabby old gowns again, and poor Mrs. de Travers felt that never was a woman so plagued and persecuted: she would have spoken her mind, but Henry Melville was there; he had come to fetch them in his mother's carriage and the young Englishman admired Anne too much to care how she was clothed. The sisters were dressed alike once more in old black silk frocks they had made themselves, and yet Anne, in her black and shabby blue feathers, looked gracious and dazzling, and more than one person gazed at her as she passed.

Fanny's sallow face ill became her blue feather—she was out of heart, out of spirits. She was not happy as she might have been in this sweet world of art, of nature, of flowers, with the melody of lovely sights in every place and corner. She never spoke and scarcely looked up. As they drove into the Piazza di Spagna, they met one of those quaint and graceful processions that pass through the streets of Rome:—A company of peasant people going off into the country to be engaged as servants and labourers. One by one they cross the street, men with

their staves, women bravely marching in their exodus. Some are old beyond their years, some looking like statues out of the Vatican, go marching off with bundles of old clothes upon their classic heads. It should have been Sunday by rights, for Sunday is the day they usually start; perhaps this procession was behind time and had loitered on the way.

One of the labourers, a ragged old man with a shaggy beard, looked up into Fanny's face as he passed the carriage. 'Hé, Signorina,' he said, 'have you not a baiocc'? I saw you one night as I lay on the palace stairs: you did not see me in the shadow. He was not there whom you expected.' He looked so wicked that Fanny shrunk away; Mr. Melville looked surprised; the peasants passed on their way towards St. Peter's.

It was a great dazzling Italian day. Italian days seem longer and more vivid than any others. Every minute is marked, something is happening and passing away, reflections lighting the red cypress-trees, flowers blooming, pigeons flying across the blue, or rubbing their breasts upon the yellow marble of a window lintel. Waters foam, and figures fill their earthen pitchers. You look up at the great palaces, with their treasures enshrined; outside are stone galleries, with blue high vaults, and statues and pictures glittering and alive. A grand conception of a saint in flying drapery comes down the steps of the Pincio. Little Beppo and his sister, the little models, come dancing

to the carriage-steps with soft monkey hands. Some one flings them a silver coin, and the boy and girl dance back, laughing and pointing their ribboned feet. Beppo flings his little high-crowned hat into the air, Stella tumbles over with a winsome little caper, as she gives the coin to her beautiful Albanian mother, who sits watching the children, with her chin upon her hands and a great basket of violets shining at her feet.

There were three carriages and some dozen people, and they set off rolling along the uneven pavements out by the Via Sacra, towards the hills. They were to lunch on a hill-side: they were to visit the beautiful gardens of the Villa Aldini, that grow silver, and emerald, and golden trees, of which the blossoms scent the winds as they blow across plains, brightening with rainbow light. They reached their journey's end by devious roads, by desolate bridges crossing half-dried streams. Every moment they neared the hills where the treasure was hidden. It was a day marked for all of them. To some it came shining out of other days, in mere delight and almost perfect happiness; by Anne and her sister it was long remembered as one of the saddest and sweetest in all their life. Sorrow came to them that day, smiling tenderly. The happiness of one sister brightened the other's gloom. They had their luncheon in the inn. Prince G., who was of the party, had brought some soup and a silver saucepan. Mr. W.—good friend from across the sea—brought fruits and viands

and Est and Falernian wine, which dear E., with grey circling eyes, dispensed with her two fair hands.

They had lunched off fruit and wine, in flagons; they had visited the garden by the lake, and the blue waters, and the pink roses, and the noble terrace of the villa. Fanny stood a little apart, watching the birds fly out across the rippling sea of grove and glade towards the shining horizon. It was a day of wonder and delight for some: to Fanny, as I have said, it was one of the loveliest and saddest of her life. Anne called her as they left the solemn villa, and came through an iron gate into a lane winding up between tree-stems, through which the ocean of country shines. They followed, one by one and two by two, through lanes of sweet sharp-leaved Spanish chestnut. There were green grasses on either side, fringed and up-starting in a spring confusion; blue-eyed flowers peeping, white starwort, anemones, white and lilac, and blue orchis rearing through the flowing grasses; broom hanging golden on the bush, and then here and there sweet hedges of rose-trees, brazen pink, sweet and glittering, and falling in profusion.

So winding onwards, with a glance at a distant line of sea, they come at last upon a plateau, where some of the party are already assembled. The great hills are tossing close at hand. Henry Melville points out a white dot on a far-away mountain.

'That is Cicero's Villa,' he says to Anne de Travers;

'and there is Castel Gondolfo crowning that solemn summit.' They look out. What a faint sweetness, what a lovely silence seems to surround them, and bring them together. Anne has her hands full of flowers, and her eyes seem full of light.

Fanny has turned away almost resentfully from the beauty to which she seemed scarcely attuned.

For some minutes past a chaunt had been sounding in their ears from a little chapel standing not far off on the hill-side. It is a chapel belonging to the Capucins, and to which they send their brothers out from Rome for change and rest and retirement. Fanny moved towards the old steps that led to the door, with Mrs. F., an English lady who was of the party. Anne and Henry Melville followed more slowly; but, instead of coming in, lingered outside on the steps. The two ladies went on alone pushed the swing-door, and came suddenly out of the light into a cold and shady chancel, dim and chill.

The narrow windows, high-slit above the altar, scarcely cast their slender stream of light beyond the choir. The officiating monks stood round the altar, upon which stood a carved and life-sized image of the founder of their order in his dress, with folded hands. They stood as motionless: their hands were crossed upon their tired breasts, their deep voices were chaunting the Penitential Psalms, their brown cowls were thrown back from their faces.

They were young men for the most part. It seemed sad to think that for them the feast of life was already ended, its great lights put out, its generous profusion wasted. Very grand they looked—indifferent, unconscious—as they stood grouped round their stony founder. One of them only moved. His face was deadly pale, his dull fixed eyes were burning dimly. He had a blue-black beard, his great brown hands were clasped against his heart.

'Come away,' whispered Mrs. F., with a shiver. 'It is so cold in here.'

Fanny started as if she had not heard. She was standing with a scared face looking at this monk, and when Mrs. F. spoke she gave a low cry and stepped back, and put her hand up against the stone wall to hold by. When she came a minute later from the church into the light again, Anne, who was sitting on the step outside with Mr. Melville, was frightened to see her looks.

'Are you ill?' she said, rising and coming forward. 'What is it, dear?'

'Barbi is there,' Fanny whispered, clinging to her sister and trembling. 'It is him. Yes, indeed,'—and she sank down upon the low wall. Anne, without a word, hurried into the church; but, as she entered, the psalm had come to an end, and the monks turned and disappeared one by one through the door. One brown cowl after another passed out, and then the door was shut, and all was silent. Anne could not tell whether she had seen

Barbi or not. She came out to her sister again, her sweet face full of tender concern.

'I cannot tell, darling,' she said; 'the service is over.'

The two friends were greatly shocked when they heard the girl's story. Mr. Melville offered to go to the convent to make inquiries.

'You can trust me,' he said to Fanny. 'Your sister will tell you why.'

The three women stood somewhat apart from the others, anxiously expecting his return. The shadows were beginning to lengthen and the sun to turn westwards. The carriages came slowly up the hill to carry them away.

Mr. Melville came back at last looking very grave. 'They will tell me nothing,' he said. 'They say they know nothing. I have seen the prior, but he is only a sub-prior, and refers me to the convent in Rome.'

They drove home in silence. Kind Mrs. F. held Fanny's hand in hers; her husband followed in the next carriage; and Henry Melville was able to find a place near Anne—Anne, who, with a beaming face, sad though she was, could not but enjoy her drive and her companionship.

The old black gown looked radiant to Henry Melville's eyes. The two young people wondered if it was their happiness that made the plains so beautiful, that illumined and vibrated from every rock and flower and ruin, or was

it the light of the glorious Italian fires, burning for sad people as well as for merry ones, for the lonely as well as for those in the good company of love?

There was no doubt afterwards that it was Barbi that Fanny had seen at Albano. When Mr. Melville went to the convent in Rome, the prior made no secret of the Marquis having joined the community a week before. He had passed several retreats in the convent, and had come on the night of the assembly at the Palazzo.

His disappearance made a great talk in Rome that winter. People were curious to know how Fanny bore her disappointment: they might have blamed her more, if Anne's marriage to Henry Melville had not been announced just about this time, and diverted the various gossips of that friendly Babel. Henry Melville was rich, well-connected, and able to protect his poor little sister-in-law from malicious tongues. I am afraid that in so doing he sometimes sacrificed Mrs. de Travers.

Poor thing! Anne's happy prospects brought her but little comfort; neither did she enjoy Lord Tortillion's death and legacy as she might have done had her own state of health been less precarious. Barbi's lawyer brought a deed of gift, by which all his presents to Fanny were assured to her, as well as a certain sum of money that he had been able to withhold from the convent. She did not refuse to take it, although she may not have wished that its use should be known. The estates and palaces,

of course, passed to the heir-at-law—a distant cousin of the Barbi family, of a nobler name and pretension even than theirs. The little apartment, shabby no longer, is changed and merged into an adjoining suite of rooms, which have for years past been inhabited by bright and gifted and good friends. Hospitable doors are set wide open, cordial voices greet you as you enter; and a grey-eyed maiden who watches from her high casement told me the story of Barbi late one starry summer's night.

They all left Rome as soon as they could move Mrs. de Travers, whose illness was more serious than they had apprehended at first.

Anne was married in London. Fanny remained by her mother, who had seemed to rally for the occasion, and who was able to be present at the ceremony in the identical velvet which had been prepared for Fanny's own wedding. But after the ceremony she discovered that the dressmaker had made up the dress the wrong way of the stuff. This had such an effect upon her that it brought on another attack, and she sank a few days after, holding Fanny's hand, and trying to speak as she looked wistfully up in her face.

And Fanny? She has never married. She is not one of the very happiest women of my acquaintance, but she is one of the most contented; her life is happier than the average, and bright and melancholy too.

Anne, however, is always looking about, and is quite

determined that her sister is to be very happy indeed. Fanny laughs, and shakes her head, and runs away to the little orphanage she has set up with Barbi's money, and where she teaches the children to read. She has many *protégés*; and there are none in whom she takes more interest than those little Italian boys who wander about London with their merry and forlorn faces, making a summer drone with their shepherds' pipes.

RIQUET À LA HOUPPE.

ARGUMENT.

SYLVIA, a fair princess, part cursed, part blessèd of fairies—
Cursed to be silly a fool, yet blessèd in beauty surpassing.
Sad did she live, sad pined, since worthless is foolish beauty;
Waiting a lover she pined: all love fell slain by her folly.
Gloomy she wanderèd once in a weird fantastic forest,
Haunted, 'tis said, yet careless of all but her sorrow she wandered.
Sudden a figure arose, half hideous, half to be laughed at;
Bowed with a comical grace as he gazed on her, funny, pathetic;
Then he began, 'Princess, you are known to me, though me you know not:
'Long have I loved you in faith while loving a pictured ideal.
'Cease for your folly to weep, such eyes should never be tear-dimmed;
Shrink not, afraid of my tuft; though a dwarf spell-bound by the fairies,
'Blessèd with wisdom am I; and the charm, not wholly malignant,
'Bids me impart to my bride great share in my blessing, if haply
'Some one be blind to my faults: yet thou mayst give of thy beauty
'Unto the man of thy choice, though ugly as Riquet the tufted.
'So sweet, pledge me your troth, and, with interchanging of natures,
'Beauty be added to wisdom, and wisdom to witless beauty:
'Ponder my words, be wise; in a year shall I look for an answer.'

. . . . . .

Happy she wandered again in the weird fantastic forest,
Haunted, 'tis said, yet careless of all but her happiness walked she.
During the year that had passed, grand lovers had bowed down and worshipped,
Lovers she now might mock in the pride of her new-found wisdom.
Sudden a clatter arose as of pots and a crashing of stewpans;
Out of the earth there started a host white-capped, white-aproned,
Bustling about high feasts for the wedding of Riquet their master.
Then with a pang came o'er her the thought of her tufted admirer.
Lo, as she thought he appeared: 'Our tryst then is not forgotten?'
Shrieked she in agony, 'No, it is hopeless; nor can I love you.'
Yet as she spoke she was crushed by the ghost of a sad recollection;
All her old self returned, and, in horror of loneliness shrinking,
Stretched she her hand for protection: he grasped it, and—transfiguration
Joyful!—his presence was changed, and he shone forth, stately and handsome.
Thus they agreed to be married, and happily lived ever after.

CHAPTER I.

TRUE LOVE.

Of all the myths of the fairy age, of its many legends and enchantments, true love seems to be the one great charm which has come down to us unchanged by time, untouched by steam-engines, and unexplained by science. Revenge may still exist, with its daggers, and flashes, and melodramatic boots and teeth, but we feel little sympathy for it, and are glad to see it looking more and more clumsy and out of place, except, indeed, in a police-court, or on the boards of a Surrey theatre. Mystery is also somewhat old-fashioned, and its poor old veils are sadly torn about and darned, and its wonders and terrors exploded. High-flown romance seems out of tune with our modern ideas, and if Lord Frederic went off to his club with Lady Matilda's sleeves fastened to his hat, we should think him a little out of his mind. But true love is true love by whatever signs and language it is spoken,—as long as hearts beat, as long as life exists, in whatever age, iron or golden, we may seek it. Only a month ago, I met stepping across the ruins of a desolated city, a bride in her

white robes, and with her white wreath of orange-flower; she came smiling hand in hand with the bridegroom, and followed by a train of young men, women and children, in mourning, for the most part, but looking happy because these two were happy. For the last hour we had been driving by charred and fallen palaces, by devastated streets, where the houses were lying in heaps in their own green gardens, crushing the sward and the flower beds. We had come by a great open place, where a storm of death, and fire, and battle, had shattered the houses, furrowed the earth, spread desolation unspeakable, and so passing some battered gates we reached a spot where there had once been a pleasant shade, a chirp of birds overhead in the branches, of children beneath the trees; all this was gone! We were crossing a great plain,—a plain covered with brushwood; it reached, swept and desolate as far as we could see to the west, where Valerien was glooming in the distance. A few black figures were walking along in the sun. It seemed very sad to us, for we had known the place from childhood. We drove n in silence, and so we came at last to a portion of the wood that had been spared. Here the carriage stopped, and the driver asked us to alight and go in under the shade. Our eyes were tired with sad sights, and our ears with his dismal histories, and we were glad to get out of the carriage . . . .

H. and I looked at each other. Had it all been a

dream? Were battle, and murder, and mourning, but horrible nightmares? We found ourselves in a green shady dell, from which many an avenue ran into glimmering depths of woodland; the birds, we remembered, were singing their old songs overhead; the trees were tranquilly shedding their autumn leaves, that had turned golden on the branches: they lay on the turf in a placid sunshine that brightened, but no longer burnt: the very stems of the trees were illuminated by it. A soft shady dazzle of blue and pearly mist, of green and shadow, enclosed us; there was a sound of water plashing, an echoing of cheerful voices of people laughing, and then we saw the wedding party advancing towards us.

Hand in hand came the bride and the bridegroom by a steep bank of rock, leading from the waterfall among the trees. She clung to him as she picked her way with white shining shoes among the stones; her veil floated, and sometimes her long dress caught in the branches. Some children ran up with flowers, and the bride smiled as she stooped to take them. I saw H. watching them all with kind eyes as the little procession went on towards a rustic hut among the trees where some sort of wedding feast seemed to be spread. I know not what scenes these people had lived through—what privations, what losses and peril of life, and wreck of hope. Here they were rejoicing—at peace among the very ruins of war—cheered by the kindly charm that comes home even to the saddest

hearts. The wedding guests were in black, as I have said, but the bride was dressed like any bride in any peaceful land, where the harvests ripen and the country people store their grain at their leisure, where the only roll is that of the heavy-laden carts, or the farm engine, in its shed; where the arms are peaceful scythes, and spades overturning the soil, and the wasps are the enemies the housewives dread, while their plums hang ripe beside the cottage door.

CHAPTER II.

DORLICOTE.

EVEN in poor war-driven France there are places as still and peaceful as the parish of Dorlicote-cum-Rockington, of which place I, by a certain association of ideas, was thinking when I wrote these last lines.

H. and I spent a month there last summer, although it must be confessed that the house was deadly dull. Mrs. Lulworth still reigned for her aunt, and did her best to pull down the blinds, muffle up the furniture, and drive away all guests, conversation, and ease of mind or of body; but old Mrs. Dormer, the real lady of the manor, seemed to have taken a new lease of energy, and suddenly at ninety to reassert her rights. Since Cecilia (whom some clle th sle eping beauty) had married her cousin Frank Lulworth, Mrs. Dormer had seen more of her family, and was for ever inviting them, to Mrs. Lulworth's unfeigned jealousy. Frank had several sisters older than himself, some married, some unmarried. The eldest of all was our friend Mrs. King, lately returned

from India with her husband, and settled at Brighton. She had married very young, and her two twin daughters were grown-up young ladies. Mrs. Dormer had met them at Cecilia's house in London. They were also on their way abroad, and were to come to Dorlicote, and spend a couple of days at the hall before they started.

Mrs. Dormer at ninety years of age seemed younger, brighter, more interested in her surroundings than she had ever been. She was a little deaf, but she had a wonderful trumpet, and her eyes sparkled brighter and brighter; she wrote the same delicate, though trembling hand; she was lame, but, if she chose, she could fly across the floor in one instant with the help of her tortoiseshell cane, and her wheel chair; she would come rolling into the room like any old fairy in her chariot, only the dragons who pulled it along were human dragons, Miss Bowley, her companion, and Mrs. Lulworth. Sometimes, instead of dragons, Cecilia's little children would come and try to push their great-grand-aunt, frolicking all round about her, and cooing and chattering in their little white pinafores.

If *her* advice had been taken, these children would have been brought up very differently, their grandmother used to say, gloomily. She could not approve of such over-indulgence for children. They might run about, scramble and shout, jump upon Miss Bowley's back; the amiable woman was sometimes discovered on all fours,

being led round the room with Cecy's sash tied to her cap-strings. One day they dived into a certain mahogany desk which their grandmother had neglected to lock. Their horror-stricken mother only rescued it in time, for Cecy had got the lid open, and Charlie was very busy under the table with something that Cecy had given him to play with. Mrs. Lulworth was heard coming, and Cecilia hurried the children away.

It was that afternoon that I heard Cecilia trying to reconcile her mother to the Kings' arrival.

'It is only for a Sunday, mamma. I think you will like Emily; she is a quiet woman, in very delicate health.'

'Delicate health!' said Mrs. Lulworth. 'Cecilia, do you think I do not know that people make delicate health an excuse for every idle and luxurious habit? Are the girls also in delicate health, Cecil?'

'No, mamma,' said Cecilia, flushing up. 'They are quite well, and though Sophy does not look it, she is even stronger than Sylvia.'

'Sylvia! What a name,' said Mrs. Lulworth. 'We shall have to send to meet them, I suppose, and the carriage has already been——' She stopped short, seeing me there, for H. and I had arrived only an hour before.

'I wonder if you will think Sylvia like me?' interrupted Cecilia, hastily; 'everybody says so, only she is

prettier than I ever was. Uncle John says she is like my grandmother Lulworth, mamma.'

This was an unfortunate speech of Cecilia's. Mrs. Lulworth's expression became more and more fixed and unpleasant.

'That will be a reason for the whole family's remaining another fortnight,' said the ungracious woman.

'And pray why should not my niece and her children remain a fortnight?' said the old fairy, suddenly appearing in the midst of us on her rolling chariot.

Cecilia gave a great stare; she had not heard her aunt coming. Frank Lulworth had rolled the old lady in from the adjoining room: the children followed scampering; Mrs. Lulworth rose to her full length of claret-coloured merino, and then sat down again.

'Emily King is as much my niece as you are Cecil,' the old lady went on, 'and her girls are my goddaughters; one of them is a beauty; I can't say much for the other. I have some very ugly godchildren; I'm always told they are clever. There is poor Tom Rickets—have you ever seen him, Frank? He called one day and nearly frightened Maria Bowley out of her wits.'

'Tom Rickets?' said Frank; 'do you mean Tufto Rickets? We used to call him Tufto at Cambridge. He is a very good fellow, and has been very ill-used. He had some money left him and came home from India. He don't seem to know what to do with himself here.'

'He is coming here to dinner to-night,' said Mrs. Dormer, shaking defiantly. 'Yes, I asked him. He can take in Sophy King, and they can be put behind a dish-cover and talk as cleverly as they like.'

'Will Mr. Tufto also require a carriage to be sent to meet him?' asked Mrs. Lulworth, sarcastically.

CHAPTER III.

COLONEL KING'S TWO DAUGHTERS.

THE Kings arrived soon after luncheon in a fly, by an unexpected train. Almost everybody was out. I happened to come back early to write some letters, and thus heard of their arrival. I was sitting in the drawing-room, finishing my letter for the post, when the door opened, and I made my first acquaintance with a person we were hereafter destined to see much of; a tall, fair, untidy figure, with a long torn flounce trailing after her, and a parcel of music under her arm.

'Oh!' she said, stopping short, 'I thought there was no one here,' and she looked at me as if she had never seen anybody in her life before. As she stood there her music began to slide from under her arm, and fell in a heap upon the carpet. A sudden breeze from the open window rushed through the room, and scattered the long limp papers. I went to her, and tried to help her to pick them up. As she thanked me, and looked into my face, I was quite surprised by her beauty, for which I was not repared from my first glance. Her eyes were specially

beautiful—now and then a radiation, a shadow, some effect of light reflected, some dilation of the pupil, gave them an expression of curious sweetness. But it was gone in a moment.

'Were you going to the piano?' I asked; 'don't let me prevent you. You are Miss King, I think?'

To which she answered, 'I am Miss Sylvia,' and then she immediately sat down to the piano. Trying to open it, she let the heavy lid fall and pinched her finger, which she put into her mouth.

I looked at her as she sat reflected in the looking-glass, and thought I had rarely seen a more beautiful creature. She was slight and gracefully made, with all the brilliance of youth and colour. Her white dress, creased and torn as it was, fell in soft folds about her, she had no cuffs or bracelets, but her lovely white arms looked all the prettier.

When her finger was better, she took it out of her mouth and began her musical exercise. . . . I nearly jumped from my seat. In one moment the chimney ornaments, the windows, the chairs upon the polished wooden floor, seemed to be set jarring and shaking by an unexpectedly loud monotonous series of sounds more or less discordant and painful to listen to. Halting notes, and blind ones, utter discord at times; and then the passage would be repeated over and over again. I was perfectly bewildered by the noise, and could not have

imagined it possible that those pretty slender little hands could have made such a din. One, two, three, four, five, six—one, two, three. She was counting away with the greatest seriousness. Was it—could it be the moonlight sonata? It was more like the cannon-ball sonata, with a bomb-shell exploding now and then.

I gathered my papers and fled, and on my way I met Miss Bowley coming down from upstairs, looking very much frightened.

'What is that?' she said. 'Mrs. Dormer is awakened. Who can it be? What a horrible noise.'

The drawing-room, with its floating curtains and great solemn windows opening on the park, was silent as usual when the first dinner-bell rang, and a short, high-shouldered young man, with odd hair curling on end, was announced. There was nobody but myself to hear what the butler said, and his voice floated into a vague empty room, where the funeral clang of the dinner-bell seemed still vibrating. It was summer-time and a dull evening in June, and though the windows were open, there was little to cheer the guest. He was dressed with great care: but not even Mr. Poole could cut his round shoulders straight, iron out the creases in his face, nor could any hairdresser, however fashionable, prevent his close crop of hair from curling up into a curious sort of bunch at the top of his head, which had given him the sobriquet of

Tufto. He came in evidently wondering what had possessed him when he accepted Mrs. Dormer's invitation to come six miles along a high road in order to sit in an empty room and to listen to the clang of this dreary dinner-bell. He sank down into an arm-chair, in a corner of the room. He did not see me at first, but presently I saw him stoop down, pick up something that was lying on the floor under the writing-table where the children had been playing; as he raised his head again he saw me in my corner.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, in an odd cracked voice, starting up. 'I didn't see there was anyone in the room,' and he came forward in a good-natured, unaffected way, as a man does whose first impulse is a friendly one. 'What a pretty old miniature,' he said. 'Do you know who it is?'

He came up and showed me an old-fashioned oval case lined with white satin, and such as those in which our grandmothers kept their ivory portraits. This one represented a lady in an old-fashioned dress, with violet eyes, a very sweet expression, and a lovely smiling face, and a quantity of waving hair.

'Sylvia!' I said, all surprised, seeing 'Sylvia' in faded gold letters upon the satin.

'Do you know her?' he asked.

'1770! It must be our Sylvia's great-grandmother,' said I.

'I call that bad luck,' said he, gravely, looking once more at the picture, 'to be born more than a half century after such a lovely creature.' Then he shrugged his shoulders and shut up the case and put it on the table, as more cotemporaneous ladies came into the room. Mrs. Lulworth, in lilac brocade with salmon trimmings; Miss Bowley in blue barège; Sophy King, the youngest of the twins, in white, with green ribbons. Mr. Rickets glanced at the miniature, and perhaps thought once more of the pensive yet enchanting head of the lady who had once existed, and he may have contrasted her with the ladies as they were.

Mrs. King looked delicate and pretty in blue satin, but she was evidently in bad health, and always gave me the impression of having seen a ghost; she was followed by the Colonel and Frank Lulworth, and by Cecilia, buttoning her gloves, and by Dr. Hicks, with his red face and well-brushed grey whiskers.

'Are we all here?' said Mr. Lulworth, coming forward in a blue coat with brass buttons.

I saw Sophy look anxiously around and begin to slip towards the door.

Old Mrs. Dormer beckoned Rickets to her. 'Come here,' she said, putting out her hand with the long tips to her white gloves. 'You will take in Sophy King; there, don't mistake, that girl with red hair and green ribbons;

she is very clever, and you must draw her out. You can make anybody talk you know. Poor Maria Bowley was never so lively in her life as that day you called. Do you hear, Maria?'

'I was very grateful to Miss Bowley,' said Rickets, with a little bow; 'she gave me a cup of the most delicious tea.'

'Very bad for the nerves,' said Mrs. Dormer; 'the present generation takes a great deal too much tea.'

'Judging from the tea one generally gets,' said Rickets, laughing, 'my impression is, this generation only waters the pot. Miss Bowley is an honourable exception.'

Miss Bowley blushed to the very edge of her blue barège.

'She don't belong to the present generation,' cried Mrs. Dormer, waving her stick.

'Dinner, ma'am,' said the butler, opening the door.

'There she is again!' said Rickets, absently following something with his eyes from window to window. It was a figure flitting along the garden-walk,—white, with floating skirts, with a lovely face, fair and dazzling, even in the dim evening. If Rickets had been alone, he might well have thought it was the ghost of the beautiful face he had seen in the little morocco case.

'It looks like Sylvia,' said old Mrs. Dormer, blinking her eyes.

'Where *is* Sylvia?' cried Colonel King, in a harsh voice. His back was turned to the window. 'Sophy, why didn't you look after her?'

'There she is!' cried Frank Lulworth. 'What can she be doing in the garden?' And in answer to an imploring look of Mrs. King's, he added, 'I will go for her: don't let anyone wait.'

'Certainly not,' said Mrs. Dormer, disappearing with a whirr of wheels.

CHAPTER IV.

DINNER.

THE whole company filed off after her, two and two, across the great hall into the mahogany-bound regions, where the soup was flowing. It had already cast up a great fish on to the table.

H. is connected by marriage with the Duke of Shropshire's family, a fact Mr. Lulworth never forgets when he takes her in to dinner. Frank Lulworth was to have sat next Mrs. King ; but as he was in the garden, running after her daughter, that lady found herself by Mrs. Dormer, with a vacant chair between herself and Mr. Rickets. I was opposite, with the doctor for a companion. My *vis-à-vis* was evidently greatly interested in the apparition.

'Was that your sister?' he was asking Sophy, in his curious, cracked voice.

'Yes,' said Sophy, absently. She seemed pre-occupied, watching her father, who was frowning and looking towards the door. I guessed why Sophy was anxious, for I could not help hearing Mrs. Dormer and Mrs. King talking together.

'It makes her father so nervous,' said Mrs. King plaintively, raising her voice. 'I can't think what to do. It is just like her to go for a walk in the garden, when we are all waiting dinner. Now Sophy never keeps us.

'Don't apologise,' said the old lady; 'Sylvia is quite pretty enough to keep us all waiting, and Sophy, who isn't pretty, is punctual; so it is all as it should be. Clear soup? Yes.'

'My poor Sophy!' said the mother, who always seemed to take a melancholy view of everything. 'It seems so hard that Sylvia should have all the beauty of the family.—(No soup?) I can't take soup: it is a great privation to me.—Aunt Dormer! If you, with all your experience, could suggest any means by which we could give her a little of her sister's good sense and thoughtfulness——'

'Suggest?' said the old lady, peppering her soup, 'don't ask me to suggest. Find her a good husband, my dear: a punctual man, who can remind her when dinner is ready. Let him have a little money to pay for it, too.'

'My Sylvia will have next to nothing,' said her mother; 'nothing but her beauty.'

'What of that?' said the old lady. 'She has beauty enough for two, and he must bring the wits.'

As she spoke, the door opened, and Frank Lulworth appeared with the apparition. Its hair was all rough and blown about, the lights on the sideboard made its eyes wink like two great blinking stars, its beautiful cheeks

were glowing. Sylvia was not unlike Cecilia—they both took after their grandmother Lulworth; but Sylvia, though one generation farther removed, was most like the beautiful original of the picture. As she came into the room, she looked round bewildered, and, seeing her mother, made a rush at the empty seat, running against a tray of vegetables on the way. She settled down like a bird in a nest.

'I couldn't find my way in, mamma,' she said, panting; 'I went into the garden to pick a rose to put in my hair; but it won't stick. Look, how I have pricked my finger! And then uncle Frank——'

'Come over here,' cried Frank Lulworth; 'that is not your place—I am to sit next your mother, Sylvia.' And greatly to Tom Rickets' disappointment, Sylvia jumped up, and as she did so she knocked over a tumbler of water that Rickets had just filled. He received a certain portion on his waistcoat and over his fish; the rest trickled down the table, past Ricket's plate, past Sophy's, across to Dr. Hicks', on the opposite side. Sylvia unconscious walked on. Rickets saw the Colonel frowning more and more ominously. The young man heroically sacrificed himself, apologised, made his excuses to Mrs. Lulworth, to Mrs. King, to old Mrs. Dormer. He did not know how it could have happened, he said.

'I was glad it wasn't me that was clumsy this time,' said Sylvia, quite loud, sitting down by Dr. Hicks.

Sophy turned as red as one of her own geraniums. Colonel King bent forward, and frowned at Sylvia. It was a very silent dinner. Sophy was very friendly to Tom Rickets, but he, in his turn, could scarcely listen to what she said, for trying to overhear Dr. Hicks' conversation with Sylvia. That was not easy, for Sylvia, frightened by her father's fierce eyebrows, only whispered 'yes' and 'no' until the dessert came, when fresh lights and fruit seemed to brighten up the somewhat dreary entertainment; Mrs. Lulworth observing this, immediately signed for the ladies to leave the room, Mr. Lulworth opened the door for them with a dapper little bow, which set Sylvia off laughing.

We had hardly got into the drawing-room when Mrs. King gave the usual little ghost-like start with which she generally begins a sentence.

'Come here, Sylie, and beg aunt Dormer's pardon, and aunt Lulworth's, and aunt Cecilia's. You have really behaved *shockingly*, and I am going to give you a *dreadful* scolding.'

Mrs. King's voice was so weak that her scoldings were generally all but inaudible. She and Cecilia were established comfortably on the sofa in rustling silks by the fire. H. and Mrs. Lulworth were opposite in two straight arm-chairs. Mrs. Dormer had not settled down into any corner—she was going off for her after-dinner nap, and the faithful Bowley stood behind her chair, only wait-

ing for the word of command, to wheel her mistress away.

Sylvia, with a suppressed exclamation, had stopped short at the far end of the room, and did not immediately obey her mother's summons. There was some whispering between the sisters, and I could see Sophy give Sylvia a push. Sylvia was shaking her head and making all sorts of curious signs to her mother, Mrs. Lulworth sat erect as usual with a supercilious smile, Mrs. Dormer waiting in the wheel chair. 'Well, child,' she said impatiently, 'what are you making all those signs about? Pray have little girls ceased to come when their mothers call them?' continued the old lady, impatiently, preparing to go, and wheeling half round.

Sylvia was advancing but slowly, with downcast eyes, with long curious shuffling steps, stumbling over her gown; she nearly tumbled over a footstool in the way.

'Don't, my dear—do take care,' said poor Mrs. King, looking quite distressed. Sylie's last stumble had brought her up before the old lady in her wheel chair.

'I beg your pardon,' the girl said; 'the butler locked the back-door from the garden, and I lost my way in the stable-yard, and that's all.'

'Hmph!' said the old lady, looking at her with two brown twinkling eyes; then turning to Mrs. King, 'That young man we were speaking of will have to be a *very* sensible man, Emily.' And she vanished in an instant.

Sylvia drew herself up; she blushed and looked more beautiful than ever: she was a little hurt, for she guessed the old lady's meaning, but her temper was so sweet, and her opinion of herself so humble, that nothing ever really made her angry.

'Why don't you come and sit down here?' said Cecilia, kindly calling her to the sofa.

Sylie still hesitated. Then the dreadful secret came out.

'Oh, mamma! I have got one white shoe on, and one black one,' she whispered. 'What *shall* I do? Do let me go. Papa will be so. . . .'

Poor girl, as she spoke the door opened, and Mr. Rickets came in, following the butler with the tea, and made straight towards the sofa by which she was standing.

CHAPTER V.

TEA-TIME.

Mr. Rickets had been completely fascinated during dinner by the beautiful apparition, and to his dismay had just heard the Colonel say over his claret that the whole family was going abroad the following Monday. This was a great disappointment to the romantic young man, who immediately determined to lose no time, and to make Miss Sylvia's acquaintance at once. He left the table and came in with the tea for this purpose, and made his way straight across the room to the spot where he saw her standing. As Rickets came up he heard Mrs. King's faint 'You had better go at once, my dear,' and the lovely Sylvia glided away immediately with a graceful sliding step which he supposed to be peculiar to her. He was glad she did not trot like most women.

Rickets was disappointed, but he made himself as agreeable as circumstances would permit.

'I hope I did not frighten Miss Sylvia away,' he said.

'Oh, no,' said Mrs. King, absently. Then she began examining the curtains, as if she thought burglars were

behind them; and Rickets found the conversation languished.

Miss Bowley had crossed the room, and was making her tea. Mrs. Lulworth was nodding off to sleep bold upright; Sophy sat down to the piano and struck a few gentle chords. Time seemed a little long; and Rickets was wishing himself back in the dining-room, when two doors opened at once. Through one came the gentlemen, all of various heights, the Colonel's black mustachios overtopping the rest; through the other door came Sylvia, carrying her lighted candle dangerously near her muslins.

'Take care, child!' cried her mother; and then, as she came up, in a low voice: 'Why, Sylvia, you have not changed your shoes, after all!'

'Yes, indeed, mamma,' said Sylvia, 'I changed them both.'

Mrs. King said no more. The Colonel was advancing; and Sylvia, evidently afraid of a lecture, fled away to the shelter of the tea-table, where Miss Bowley was combining her hot water and sugar and teacups. Rickets immediately gave up his seat to the Colonel. This was an opportunity not to be missed. When the young man reached the tea-table, Sylvia, still holding her candle, was saying, 'Oh, Miss Bowley, you have got a little spider on your cap. Sit still: I will take it off.'

Sylvia was short-sighted, and she was stooping and

holding the candle so near to the spider, that Rickets involuntarily started forward, and cried, 'Take care, Miss King!'

Sylvia turned round; as she turned, Miss Bowley's lappets shot up in two sudden flames. In an instant there was a blaze, a scream, a rush. . . .

Some one tore Sylvia away, some turned on the boiling water, some one knocked over a chair; and then Rickets, in his shirt-sleeves, was seen half-choking poor Maria, as he wrapped his coat round and round her head. It was cruel to smile, and yet difficult not to be cruel. The poor thing emerged faint, panting, half-stifled from the coat, with one set of curls completely frizzled away. She looked most piteous as Rickets conducted her to a sofa. He had forgotten to put on his coat again, and supported her with the greatest care and kindness. Sylvia stood petrified. Her father had seized her roughly by the arm. 'You do it on purpose,' he said, setting his teeth.

Mrs. King began nervously to blow out all the candles within her reach.

'I hope you are satisfied with your evening's performance,' said Mrs. Lulworth, coming up with a short laugh. Poor, palpitating Sylie! she seemed quite stunned by the consciousness of her enormity.

'Satisfied?' said her father, bitterly. 'Do you suppose *this* will satisfy her?'

It was well things were no worse. Good Bowley's

curls were easily replaced, and I was touched to see Sylvia rush after her as she was leaving the room. 'Darling Miss Bowley, are you hurt? are you dreadfully frightened?' she said. Good old Bowley assured her it was nothing, and the two went off together.

I could see that Rickets was very indignant with Colonel King for his treatment of Sylvia. 'They are all in a league,' I heard him mutter as he pulled on his coat. He wished us good-night very shortly, and went off the instant his brougham was announced

Next day he called, and left a whole packet of cards; but Mrs. Lulworth had given orders that no one was to be admitted.

'Why did you do that, mamma?' Cecilia asked.

'I do not approve of Sunday visitors,' said Mrs. Lulworth.

On Monday, Mr. Rickets called again very early on horseback. The Kings had driven off half an hour before. Mrs. Lulworth appeared at a window in claret-coloured merino. She did not come down to say good-bye, but her husband was there making his dapper little bows, and Cecilia and the children stood waving their hands at the door. We seemed to see Sophy's eyes twinkling after she had driven off, with a diary under one arm, and a sketch-book under the other.

'I will write,' she cried. 'I shall send you news of all friends at St. Pierre.' (Our friends were chiefly old

ladies in large straw hats, whose acquaintance we had made some ten years before.)

'How happy that girl looked,' I said to H. 'Why are we not all provided with a good stock of enjoyment to last us our lives? It is all spent in a few years, and then there is nothing. . . .'

'Do you think so?' said H., laughing. 'I find some things are as good at sixty as at sixteen. Other people's happiness is a great deal better.'

CHAPTER VI.

SOME PASSAGES FROM SOPHY'S CORRESPONDENCE.

'HERE out of my window is a sketch ready made—a grey sloping roof, with wooden beams, and moss-grown stones upon the tiles. There is a wooden balcony, where a woman sits at work all day. There is a garden down below, full of lupins and sunflowers, and scarlet-runners against a trellis; the hotel cook is walking there between his courses, all dressed in white. My sketch is too big for the paper, as many sketches are. It scarcely takes in the plums, or the apple-tree all studded with crimson fruit. There is a chime in the air, torrents foam, birds fly from height to height, the goats tinkle home at night, each cow rings its bell as it browses the turf and the wild thyme, the people are at work upon the hills reaping their saffron crops.

'If I look out, I see a mountain, with a grey dome of cloud and shadows, out of which flow sudden sweet lights, rippling down the rocky sides; the lights flow, a soft wind comes through the leaves of the trees all about my window; a sweet sort of calm is everywhere, and one cow-bell is tinkling. Yes, you *must* come. I am sure you

would like the place, dear Miss Williamson, and the mineral waters would make dear Mrs. H. quite well again. What delightful walks we should take together! Yesterday I went out alone. Sylie was practising, and papa was busy. All along the way it was like a fairy-tale. I do think this place is a fairy-land. By a cottage-door sat an old woman spinning, with a little boy playing at her knee. He was sitting on a low wooden stool, with a bit of broken plank. When he saw me he began to sing, and to beat his little feet in time, and to play upon his plank as if it were a fiddle. The old woman smiled and nodded. There were flowers all round about them, big sunflowers blazing in the gardens, and balsams in the windows. Then I came to some women washing in a stream. They all cried, "Good-day." The stream flowed and sparkled away through moss and wild flowers, hurrying down to the torrent below.

'Then I reached a pine wood, all shivering with pretty lights; mosses were growing, and ferns so delicate and gentle, that it seemed as if each one should have been alone in a glass conservatory, instead of twinkling here on the high roadside. The trees opened out the valley below. It seemed full of light, of winds stirring, of sounds. It was a Wagner-like chorus of birds and insects; of grasshoppers whistling; far off dogs barking; the tone of human voices on the air like the drone of insects; the bells of browsing animals; and I thought of this beauti-

ful moment multiplied by all the existences round about —not my moment only, but theirs as well.

'I did long for you—for some one to share it—some one who could feel it all as it seemed just then. I heard steps coming across the turf. It was a little girl, with dark eyes, and a little black cap tied under her chin. She held a bunch of bluebell-like flowers, and as I passed, she shyly put them into my hand. I asked her where the green path led to? "To the Cheminée de Fées," said she. And then she ran away down the sloping moss, and isappeared among the trees.

'The Cheminée de Fées is a wonderful place, with a reat view, and a wild chasm overgrown and overflown with the forest green: the cheminées are tall columns standing high overhead; time and the rains and the winds have cut them out of solid earth. Sometimes they fall away, but there are others rising round about them, the fairies can well attend to their own kitchen. My scramble ended on the open heights above St. Pierre, on the side of the Prarion, as the mountain is called. When I came out into the open I saw two big birds hopping before me among the bracken, and suddenly they spread their great wings and flew right away straight across the valley to the faint rolling clouds that were gathering above the opposite heights. They were eagles! I looked about and wondered to find myself the companion of eagles; by some perversity of mind I tried to think of Lulworth Hall

and our visit there and aunt Lulworth's proprieties; but one flap of those great wings seemed to undo all the tiny threads which we had brought with us to St. Pierre. I was very tired by this time, and I made my way to a pretty châlet perched on a rock in the shade of the pine forest. It stood as all châlets do, with a lovely glimpse of the view. It was neatly packed and stacked with the winter's wood beneath the broad eaves. There seemed no one about except a few hens; a hoe was lying before the door, which was open. I went in; the big sitting-room was empty, in order, the rough country crockery stood upon the dresser, two hearts were cut in the great beam that ran across the roof; the bed was neatly made, the wooden chairs stood in their places, the low lattice window scarcely lighted the room. As I came away I happened to peep through a half-open door into the hayloft. There was the whole family comfortably buried in the soft fresh hay, women and children soundly sleeping together. One little thing opened a pair of great shining eyes and looked at me solemnly. . . . I must not bore you with my dear peasant people any more, but tell you about ourselves in our new home. Mamma is charmed with her room and her sofa by the window; Quince her maid is a little more cross than usual, but that is nothing. Everything else is so pretty. My poor Sylvia is my one trouble. I am afraid things get worse and worse. She got up to-day when papa reproved her, and went away with her eyes full

of tears; there were two or three people in the room and I was so sorry for her. There is an American couple we have made friends with. He is from Kentucky and a great Alpine climber. She is a pretty little New York lady, very fond of dress, and also of a dear little baby she has called Cornelia. It has ear-rings and wears two little gold bracelets. This morning I saw it holding out its little arms to a poor wretched old crétin who does odd jobs about the place. The poor thing came forward with strange inarticulate noises, groanings, and gesticulations: the little baby was delighted and smiled and put out its arms again. Yes, little children are like the kingdom of Heaven, and make no difference between persons.

'Sylvia disappeared after papa's reprimand. I could not think where to find my poor dear, until Mr. Sydney, the American, told me he had seen her go up towards the great walnut-tree; and there I found her, lying fast asleep, with her head on the turf and her arm lying across one great root. She looked so pretty, and like the nymph of the old tree, I would not awaken her, but sat by her till she opened her eyes.

'It is so warm we can all sit out. Papa reads his *Times* of an evening and smokes his cigar after dinner in the gallery, by the light of an oil-lamp that hangs by our windows. Sylie and I sit near him, and watch the stars go down behind the pine woods.'

There was also a postscript from Mrs. King, containing

some commissions and a friendly entreaty that we should join them. 'Colonel King is delighted with the place,' said Mrs. King in her tremulous handwriting. 'I have the bad luck not to like mountains, and I am not yet quite used to the rats. The cow-bells are also annoying, and wake one up of a morning. The food is so-so, the beds are decidedly hard, and my maid Quince complains of her room. But you are such a good manager, dear Miss Williamson, that you would be sure to enjoy it all, and we shall most certainly be delighted to see you.

Letter II.

Lulworth Hall, Dorlicote, July 25th.

'Many thanks, my dear Sophy, for your pleasant letter, which brings the little place back to me most vividly. Your mother's kind postscript also gave us both pleasure. How we should like to see you all again in your green valley—and snow mountains sound very refreshing this hot summer. Next year, if you return to St. Pierre, we hope to be able to join you. H. is the originator of this wild dream, and you know I go wherever she does. I found your letter at the post-office yesterday, when we drove into Dorlicote. Mr. Rickets was there. He persuaded us to go in and call upon his mother, and he asked many questions about you all—so many that H. was tempted to read him some portions of your letter

when he called this morning. Mr. Rickets also talks of going abroad; he is undecided, and talks of Spain or Norway. He is going back to India for a year this autumn.

'Cecilia is gone, and Mrs. Dormer is preparing for another flight with H. and myself to Ryde and the Isle of Wight. I hope your father will not think us *giddy young creatures.* And with love to your mother and Sylvia, believe me

'Yours affectionately, my dear Sophy,

'M. WILLIAMSON.'

CHAPTER VII.

MORE CORRESPONDENCE.

I HAD another letter from Sophy; she seemed to have plenty of time to herself, and it was a relief to the little thing's bubbling-over enthusiasm to pour it out in thin ink upon foreign striped paper.

'Yesterday,' Sophy wrote, 'I was told that a "demoiselle" wished to speak to me. I went down and found the funniest old woman waiting in the passage, with a large straw hat and a little parcel in her hand. She had come to ask for news of you, she said. She heard we were English, and she had called. She brought us a present of nuts, and a bunch of dried grass and invited us to her farm. I shall certainly go: old Christine, the donkey-woman, can show us the way. The "demoiselle's" name is Honorine, she does not cultivate the farm herself—she trots about in her black stockings, and lets the land to her cousins, also "demoiselles." This is a country where the women till the land, reap, store, work as men do elsewhere. They are gentle, not unrefined, very contented—as who should not be with real work to do? They see the

grain growing that they themselves have sown as they sit knitting of an evening in their little galleries. Their cows munch the hay that they have reaped, they have a right to rest when their day's work is over. I often envy them. How glad I should be to sow grain and store provender instead of reaping chaff all my life and the fruit of other people's labours.

'Yesterday the sun came out and we went to buy some shady hats at the Établissement, where they told us we should find a milliner. The way led through a pine wood, by a little winding path like a green ladder, and as we went along we met two nuns coming through the trees, and looking very black and picturesque. I suppose they had been to visit some sick person, but I do not envy them as I envy the peasant women; their lives don't seem to be real lives somehow, but made up to order, just as much as my own. They passed on their way and were followed by a lady out of a fashion-book, tripping by on high tottering heels, with a bunch of wild flowers in her hand, and a cane, she bowed as she went by, and then, right at our feet, we suddenly came upon a flat shining roof, and we heard a sound rising like the hum of bees; and looking down we saw a bird's view of a great wide court, with galleries all round and a garden beyond, and the tops of the hats of grand ladies and gentlemen passing backwards and forwards. Some were leaning over the galleries, some were preparing to drive off in open carriages, some were

sitting on benches in the shade. Besides the fine ladies there were priests, peasants, and the old donkey-woman with her donkey all looking like rolling peas, as C. used to say. The pine woods enclose the bathing-house on every side except one. The mineral waters flow out of a cleft in the rocks, the torrent dashes along a granite basin, upon which this great house is built. You cannot think how strange it seems to find a busy world such as this one hidden away deep in the wooded ravine. The people stared at us a little as we came down by a bridge leading from one of the galleries. Christine, the donkey-woman, knew us and nodded, peasants went by holding little bottles of the water which they were carrying away to their mountains. Old Honorine, with her wide straw hat and her two tidy black legs, and another round parcel under her arm, trotted past as usual, very busy about something or other.

'Sylvia said it all looked like a willow-pattern plate, and so it did, bridges, strange trees, pavilions and galleries, ladies coming and going in long Chinese-looking dresses with floating ends. There was a straight walk edged with poppies and strange plants, unlike anything I have ever seen anywhere else. There was also a curious silence—the pine woods seemed to absorb the sounds and to keep them wandering among their labyrinths of stems and branches. As we crossed one of the bridges we met a cardinal in purple, followed by his confessor. They were

both reading in their breviaries—but they looked up and bowed very politely and then went on with their devotions. Sylvia sat on the side of the bridge and stared at them with all her big eyes. At the end of the alley I recognised our dévote from the hotel, who nearly prostrated herself on the pathway when the cardinal went by for the second time. I suppose these waters are good for the clergy, we meet so many priests—poor things, they totter along, pale and emaciated, but the cardinal paces firmly between the poppies in his purple stockings.

'One old priest was resting on a bench. Two stout peasant women came up, and sat down on either side of him.

'"Eh bien, Monsieur Babot, comment ça va?"

'"Gently, gently," said he.

'I have tried to draw them, and the poppies, and the sunset, and the white monk I saw looking up at the sky, but it is a feeble little sketch. One skein of yarn would be of more use to me if I could spin it. While we were buying our hats at the stall under the gallery, we thought we saw that little Mr. Rickets we met at Dorlicote passing along the opposite side of the court; but it would be an out-of-the-way place for him to have come to, and I think we must have been mistaken, though Sylvia herself was struck by the likeness.

'I am not more happy about Sylvia than I was when I last wrote to you. Papa does not see how she feels his

quick words, and I do believe it is from mere nervousness on both sides that so much goes amiss. I must leave off now for I am going to Chamonix for the day. I wish Sylvia could come in my place: we ought to be so happy, and yet these wretched misunderstandings seem to spoil it all.'

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE BALCONY.

Poor Sophy! she was not contented with her lot in life, but even Sophy scarcely suspected how much her father's slights and angry reproofs affected her sister Sylvia told me all about this time long afterwards. Sometimes she used to wake up at night and cry. 'I am only a trouble to everyone,' she used to say to herself. 'Oh, how happy Sophy is to be clever! She can make mamma forget her nerves; she can write papa's letters. Everybody always talks to her. Even the little baby likes her best, because she can play such pretty games. Oh, who wouldn't rather be clever than beautiful!' That morning Sylvia came down to breakfast very much in this mind. The door banged—her mother gave a nervous shriek, but the Colonel, for once, did not reprove his daughter—he was pre-occupied—his five-pound notes were running short—and he was proposing to go over to Chamonix to call at the banker's. Mrs. King immediately gave him a series of commissions—some Liebig's Extract, half-a-yard of pink silk, a pair of india-

rubber overshoes, some Valerian, some small corded bobbin, a packet of English pins, three-quarters of a yard of narrow black edging.

'I had better take Sophy,' said the poor man, looking distressed. 'I shall never be able to remember half these things.'

'Couldn't you take Sylvia too?' said Mrs. King, nibbling her bread-and-butter.

Sylvia was so pleased that she forgot she was pouring out the coffee, and it would have all run over if her father had not seized her hand just as the saucer was full to overflowing.

'As usual,' he said. 'No, I can't be responsible for Sylvia. When she ceases to be a trouble to everybody, then——'

'If I have to wait till then, I shall never go anywhere,' said Sylie, trying to gulp down the bitter feeling in her throat.

'Don't answer impertinently,' said Colonel King.

Poor Sylvia! she said no more, and went on with her breakfast of sour bread and ashes and waters of Babylon; the coffee was black and bitter, the crusts nearly choked her. The carriage came cheerfully jingling to the door in the sun, and Sophy went off in her best hat, very loath to leave Sylvia; but she was used to leaving her sister, and to feeling useful herself, and so her distress did not last all the miles that lie between St. Pierre and Chamonix.

'Sylie shall take care of me,' said her mother, kindly; 'she shall read me a Porteous in the gallery.'

Porteous was Mrs. King's favourite book of sermons; and here is Sylvia sitting by her mother's low chair, with the balsam-pots on the edge of the gallery, and Sophy's great bunch of wild flowers in a jug on the little wooden table beside them, and she is reading while the hills shine and brighten. It is a lovely morning, flecked with clouds; one gleam of cool green light is on the opposite hills; there come occasional jingles of bells, for it is a fête day. Notwithstanding the Saint, many of the people are at work; and Virginie, the housemaid, with water from the well, is resting by the roadside. The old gardening woman is busy, too, in her patch among the cabbages that grow in orderly array to the sound of the torrent below. In the adjoining fields the flax is laid out to dry. The hills wave into soft wreathing clouds. The trees are laden with fruit. The lupins and scarlet-runners and melons are all dazzling together in the garden. Some child down below is singing a little inarticulate song, the dévote comes out of her room, with her worsted work and her trailing gown, on her way to breakfast, and looks out upon the gallery.

'A beautiful day,' she says. 'You are reading history, mademoiselle?'

'Sermon,' says Mrs. King gravely in French.

'Ah! this earth,' said the lady from Marseilles, with

a gasp. 'Happiness is not for the earth. Only in the skies is he to be found. You do not come down to breakfast,' with a shake of the head.

'No, *plutot*,' says Mrs. King, with a start, still in French, as she supposes.

Then the breakfast-bell rings, and a little country-cart drives up to the door and some one gets out.

'It looks like an Englishman,' said Sylie, peeping over. 'I suppose *he's* come to breakfast.'

'Go on, my dear,' said Mrs. King.

Sylie went on, but her thoughts were wandering through the fresh landscape to Sophy driving along the pass between the white mountains. Temptation, condemnation, sin—she didn't want to think about them all just then, but about beautiful, sparkling snow-crests, about people who loved each other, and always moved slowly and carefully. Oh! she *must* make them love her. She *would* try to be good.

'The fault and corruption of every coffee-cup that naturally is upset of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone,' she read in a drawling voice.

'My dear! what are you saying?' said her mother...

Breakfast was being handed round in the dining-room at that moment, hot and frizzling, from the trap-door in the wall; and yet the Englishman looked as if he did not like his breakfast, thought Isidore, the waiter, as he flew round in his white waistcoat. 'What a pity! the

breakfast was good—better than you could get down below at the baths.'

The Englishman said everything was excellent; but, all the same, he was evidently disappointed, and gazed blankly at the dévote, who was fasting elaborately, and casting up her eyes, for it was a Wednesday.

Then a quarter of an hour went by in silence, which was presently interrupted by a screaming organ and a barking of dogs, and a dismal opera tune outside, jarring sadly enough with the peaceful flow of the torrent and the sunshine. A man in a peaked hat, a dark-faced girl, dressed like a man, in red, with a red ribbon in her hair, appeared on the terrace.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' cries the girl, in a hoarse voice, 'look and see the Spanish hoop and the celebrated water-trick, which will now be displayed;' and she threw herself down upon the ground in her juggler's dress, and went through certain evolutions with hoops and water-jugs.

The Englishman had left the table, and was standing smoking at the door by this time. There was something very sad and vexing in this dismal revelry. The poor bold-faced girl was making a weary living out of discord and contortion; her shrieks and gesticulations filled the traveller with pity; he felt in his pocket for some money to give her; and then telling M. Isidore that he should come back for dinner, prepared to walk away down the

village street. As he turned from the door, a small silver coin fell at his feet, and the young man looked up and saw a hand over the carved ledge of the wooden balcony above.

Sylvia, overhead, had been fumbling in her pocket for some little coin, and it was her hand that hung for a moment in mid-air and then drew back. She had not many coins to spare, poor little maiden; but there was something so sad in the forced merriment of the two itinerants; she felt so sorry for them, trudging through this lovely world deafened to its music by an organ; bound to Spanish hoops, and tinselled over with glitter and shabby scarlet, that she sent the little bit of pitiful silver after them, that fell at Rickets' feet. The man seized upon Tom's two-franc piece, and got tipsy with it afterwards. The girl kept Sylvia's mite carefully for her needs. Rickets walked away, still smoking his cigar.

'. . . And a little more attention, for I am sure, my dear child, that you would not wish to continue giving us so much anxiety,' concluded Mrs. King up in the gallery. 'And now run out. You look quite pale, and the fresh air will do you good. Take Quince with you.'

Sylvia felt her heart so heavy and desponding that she was glad to escape; but Quince was a dreadful infliction. Quince was her mother's maid, who hated walking, and was no friend to Sylvia. She put on a sour black face to go out in, and was always half an hour studying it in the

glass, and tying her bonnet-strings, and changing her shoes. Sylie waited for her ever so long in front of the house. The French lady who was slowly perambulating the terrace told her they had had a stranger to breakfast —a gentleman, who had little appetite, she said, and who had walked away down the village.

CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH THE VILLAGE.

THE village looked all alive and busy in the beautiful sun-glitter upon the snow peaks and tiled roofs. Little Josephine, the one baby in the place, sat in her go-cart at her mother's shop-door. The old crétin was polishing her brass pans; they all dazzled and twinkled, so did the windows of the old grey convent that stands in the little Grand Place on venerable arches, to which the grocer has hung candles and flasks of country wine. The fountain was falling sparkling into the stone basin, where the cactus grows. It has been trained like a cup to catch the falling waters. The lights were shining on the little green bower, where the old villagers were already sitting pledging each others' asthmas and rheumatisms.

It was a fête-day, and some early mass was about to begin in the church of St. Damien and St. Peter. The village women, with their smart kerchiefs and gold ornaments, stood waiting round about the door. Here and there some old fellows from the mountain, with long

coats and brass buttons like Mr. Lulworth's, stood discussing the war or the crops, or Jean Martin's new house on the mountain. The little bell came swinging up the street and echoing along the valley. The villagers stood in groups, waiting for the service to begin, or followed one another in straggling procession to the great doors of the church, where the incense was burning and the lights twinkling in darkness, and the shining little figures hanging high overhead. The three priests had come across the graveyard from the melancholy home where they lived. The long grass grew in front of it; the shutters flapped. I know not why it looked so sad when everything else was bright in the little village. People passing by could see glimpses of black soutanes hanging up from pegs in the dismantled rooms.

A lane leads past the Presbytery from the village to the Devil's Bridge below. Along the lane old Christine is trudging. She greets her acquaintances and nods kindly to Rickets, who is now sitting on a log by the roadside, finishing his cigar. He points to a green cross-path, and asks if it leads to the baths? 'Yes,' she says. Poor old Christine, plodding hour after hour by her donkey, should know all the paths and roads about the place; as she travels on with a dirty old smiling face, and bent shoulders, and clumsy shoes, while flowers are scattered at her feet and garlands hang overhead.

Rickets moralises a little to himself, as he watches

her along the way; presently he hears some more voices at the turn of the road.

'It is going to rain, I tell you; look at them clouds. Nor can I possibly keep hup, Miss, if you walk so fast; nor would it be expected that I should.' The voice sounded so vulgar and disagreeable, and jarred so with the surrounding quiet, that Rickets, to avoid it, rose from his log and went on by the pretty green path that led from the high road to the torrent.

Sylie, wilful for once, came on with the scolding maid.

'Nor are we, in any ways, on the way to the farm, Miss Sylvia,' continued Quince.

'There is Christine, I will ask her,' said Sylie, starting forward.

She set off running, and she caught up to the old woman in a minute. She did not see that Quince was not following. The maid had stopped short in high dudgeon, had turned, and was walking straight home again. It would be easy to complain of Miss Sylvia; and Quince knew by experience that such complaints were generally believed.

Sylie, looking back, saw her well on her way homewards, toiling up the steep in her grand yellow bonnet. The clock struck ten from the spire overhead. Rickets heard it down by the rushing torrent.

'Yes, this was the way to the Ferme au Pré,' said the

old donkey-woman to Sylvia; who then asked her if she was not going to church. 'No, she did not go,' said Christine; 'she had to take her donkey to the baths, where a sick lady was waiting for a ride. One must earn one's livelihood and food for the donkey. Heaven is for the rich,' she said, 'not for the poor. Honorine was a propriétaire and had time for mass, not she; it was all she could do to feed herself and her donkey and her little sick grandchild.' Then she told Sylvia to go straight on; there was no mistaking the road.

The sweet freshness of the early morning made all the breezy winding roads still sweeter. Sylvia looked once more at the retreating Quince, and then went on her wilful way, hurrying as she went—a slender figure flying up the steep that leads to the hill beyond the Devil's Bridge. There the torrent falls through the green mossy glen; the cool spray dashes across the fern-grown road; some of it lay on her thick hair as she hurried on her way. The light was on the hedges, where wild roses were still hanging and autumn berries shining. Mont Blanc itself, great mountain that it is, shines with the morning, the flames fly with the shifting sunlight.

As Sylvia wandered on the great peaks seemed to rise; winding paths unfolded; copses, pine woods, green fields, succeeded one another. The little village on its rocky battlements was far away now. Everything was happy, lovely, and harmonious. Sylvia did not think that of all

the landscape she was, perhaps, the sweetest sight. As she advanced all the trees seem to circle round and round her, dancing and closing in. Once they opened out to let two old ladies pass by—two funny old ladies in frill caps tied close to their faces, with straw hats on the top of the caps and gorgeous handkerchiefs, and gold ornaments round their brown old necks. They stopped short, and stood nodding and smiling.

'How-d'y'-do?' says the first with the crimson kerchief. 'Are you going to the fairies' kitchen?'

Sylie felt sure this smiling old fairy had just come from it herself. She answered that she was going to the Ferme au Pré.

'Straight on by the mossy rocks,' the old women both said, still nodding their heads. Then one of them, with a yellow kerchief, asked if she was from Paris. 'I have a nephew there, a coachman,' said she.

'Not from Paris!' cries the other; 'from England! farther still. Hé! I have heard of England. I have read of England in a book. Your king is gone to fight the Saracens in the Holy Land, and his bride is the Empress Matilda. I know many things in my cottage in the forest,' said the old lady. Here the first old woman, who seemed more interested in the present, interrupted her friend.

'Are you a bride?' she said.

Sylie blushed and said 'No,' and both the old ladies smiled approvingly.

'We are not married,' says old crimson kerchief. 'There is happiness in all states for the sober and laborious. You have many heathen in England,' she added, lingering and shaking her head as she tucked her umbrella under her arm. Then politely, to make up, 'We ourselves have but little religion. Our bishop is so often ill.'

'Don't believe her,' said the coachman's aunt. 'Monseigneur is at the baths down below; he will soon be better, and there is the fête next month, and the great fair for the animals. The gens de Chamonix and others come driving their beasts over the mountains; there are cows, and porcs, and goats. Ah! you should be here to see. They are all in the Prâ behind the inn, so fat, so clean!'

Then the old ladies trotted off smiling, arm in-arm, leaning on their tall umbrellas.

Sylie looked after them, almost expecting to see them slip into one of the granite rocks along the road, for their weather-beaten, worn faces might have been cut from the brown stone. People do become part of the worlds they live in. Who would not like to be made up of rocks, and torrents, and green mosses, and beautiful clouds, and distant views. Sylie met another traveller, a woman who held a string, and led a little pig.

'It was not well,' she said. 'She was taking it for change of air to the cabane of the Mont Joli. The air was so clear and fine up there she thought it might be of benefit to the invalid.'

CHAPTER X.

SYLIE ALONE IN THE FOREST.

THE little pig trotted off, and Sylie found herself alone. Now and then a fir-cone rolled to her feet, now and then a bird flew out of a tree, now and then a sudden sunlight came dazzling into her eyes. For a time she delighted as she went, then suddenly the very brightness of the landscape brought back her own troubles to her mind. Perhaps she was getting tired, hurrying so quickly. She sank down to rest, and as she did so, thought they might be vexed with her for coming so far alone; then she began to cry quietly to herself, thinking of her many troubles. She started up and set off again, and then she looked round and found that, dazzled by her tears, she had missed the way. She had wandered round the little green murmuring pine wood; some swift clouds were gathering, drifting, veiling the landscape, closing in softly on every side, and she could no longer remember where she was.

What had she done? Where was she? What was she to do? Poor Sylie stopped short, looked round about her, and began to run in utter despair, while the rain

pattered on the trees overhead. Suppose she got wet, suppose she *never* found the way. She saw a little woodman's hut standing on the other side of a clearing: perhaps they would help her there and direct her home. But before she could reach the place she found that she must cross a sliding depth leading straight to the foaming torrent. She got over somehow, she hardly knew how. The hut was only a carpenter's shop, empty, and full of shavings! A little grey cat darted along a beam when Sylvia entered; there was no one else. Then her heart began to beat anew. What was the good of having come? How should she ever get home? How should she ever cross that horrible precipice again? What would her mother say? What would Quince say if she tore her dress? They would tell her father. How angry he would be. After all her good resolutions, here she was alone, lost, miles away from home. It was all too dreadful, thought Sylie, getting more and more frightened. If only Sophy were there, she would know what to do. 'No wonder everybody loves her,' thought poor Sylie; 'it's only me that nobody cares for. I am sure I don't care for myself.' She leant her head against the wooden wall as she sat upon the half-sawn log and cried more bitterly than ever. It was not only for to-day, for all the past tiresome disappointing days that were over and to come. It was because it was raining; because she had lost her way; because

she did so want to be good, and happy, and loved like Sophy, that she was crying.

While Sylvia was crying, had the Fates relented and began to spin two threads together that had hitherto crossed each other in devious direction? or had some planet passed into a new conjunction, and was the fate of all those who belonged to its rotation changed? Some people might say that Rickets had only come up from the baths for a morning walk, that he had breakfasted at St. Pierre, and walked by the torrent, and climbed up by a steep sort of ravine, where a winter avalanche had swept a path for summer tourists, and that being overtaken by the rain, he made straight for a little hut he saw standing conveniently near. The door was open—he walked in. . . .

He recognised her in an instant. For what other reason had he come to St. Pierre than to do so? just to say 'How do you do, Miss King? We met, I believe, at Mrs. Dormer's, my name is Rickets.' . . .

'Miss King,' he exclaimed, and stood expecting her answer, but Sylie, foolish child that she was, only started, and gave a little shriek. 'Who's there,' she cried, and then looked vaguely round all frightened as if to make a rush to the door. 'Who are you,' she said. Then seeing that he did not move, she sank down again helplessly, letting her hands fall in her lap.

'Don't you know me, Miss King?' Rickets repeated again, 'I am sorry to find you in such distress.'

Sylvia began to recognise him, although she had never spoken to him before, and she looked up in his face. . . .

As she looked up he was quite taken aback by her extraordinary beauty. She was still sitting on one of the tressels, all the shavings were curling round about her feet; from the top of the beam the little grey cat was peeping down at the strange visitor; between the joints of the boards some green vines were thrusting their tendrils, and through the open doorway he could see a pastoral landscape beyond the shower, bounded by the dazzling mountain range, all glittering and sparkling in broad daylight. For a moment all this natural beauty seemed culminating in the beautiful face before him.

Rickets was, as I have said, a quick and romantic man. He would have been ready to sympathise with the ugliest of women if he had found her in trouble, how much more with this lovely innocent face with its helpless tender eyes that had haunted him all these days. The curious sweet shadow had come into them, some dilation of the pupil, some mysterious action of the brain upon the outward organ.

'I remember now,' said Sylvia, at last. 'How did you know me? I didn't know you.'

'I have been hoping ever since I first saw you,' said Rickets, gravely, 'to meet you again, and to know you

better, and that some day you might know me better and trust me too. You do not know of what importance your good will is to me,' he said abruptly.

Sylvia shook her head. 'Mine! It is no use to anybody. . . . Oh, I have lost my way: I am very unhappy,' she cried, bursting into fresh tears. Then she remembered that she had strangely forgotten herself, speaking in such a way to a stranger. What would he think of her? what had she been thinking of? what would Sophy say? Sylie felt desperate, and hid her face in her hands for very shame.

'What *can* I do for you,' said Rickets, in a tone of the kindest commiseration. 'I had been so hoping to see you again; I did not expect that I should find you in such distress as this.'

'No, no: I am not in distress,' Sylie repeated. 'It doesn't matter; nobody cares: indeed they don't.'

It was a curious dialogue between these two strangers, who in five minutes seemed to have become intimate friends; and yet Sylvia unconsciously had long been a friend of friends, chosen among all others by the acquaintance whom she had scarcely recognised as he entered the hut. How oddly he was speaking. How could he know all about everything? What did he mean?

'I know that you are not very happy,' he was saying: 'I guessed it that first evening I ever saw you. You say no one cares; if I dared,' he cried, with a sudden impulse,

and his voice faltered, 'I would tell you that there is one person who would think it the crowning happiness of his life to devote himself to your service.' His earnest gaze made her eyes fall beneath his.

She was used to compliments, she was used to scolding, poor child, and to her sister's good-humoured banter; but to serious kind words such as these she was all unaccustomed; they made her heart beat as she listened with averted face. She looked up at last to answer. There stood a strange little comical figure staring at her from behind the half-sawn log upon which he was leaning his elbows, his hat was pushed back, his nose was red, his face looked pale. He looked so grave, he spoke to her with so much deference and yet with so much authority, that Sylvia, from some foolish recesses of her small mind, was struck by the absurdity of anyone speaking to her so seriously, expecting *her* to understand, and she suddenly burst out laughing.

Rickets felt he deserved something more than this. He flushed up when she laughed.

'What are you laughing at?' he asked, quite angrily; so angrily that Sylie laughed no more, her eyes again filled with tears, and her beautiful little mouth quivered.

'I—I—beg your pardon,' she faltered. 'I never settle things—it's Sophy, and please don't be angry with me; please let me go home.'

Her terror filled him with a great pang of pity for the

lovely frightened child. Was *she* afraid of him—she, poor child, for whom and for whose sake he was pleading?

Rickets felt inclined to be merciful and let her go. He had been rash, behaved preposterously. Rash as he had been, preposterous as it was, he wanted an answer. He felt his advantage in the very look of her blue eyes. If he lost this moment, it might never come again—there was no knowing what might happen.

'Listen,' he said. He was now speaking plainly enough. 'I know very well that I am a great deal too old and too ugly to hope to please a young lady at first sight; but, if you *could* get to think of me, I know I could love you so much that you would forget everything else.' And he came forward from behind the door, and stood among the shavings looking at her as she shrank away into the very farthest corner of the little wooden hut. 'Do you think,' he went on, a little bitterly, 'that love counts for nothing at all, and that my whole life, which I am ready to give to your service, is only something to laugh at? You say you are not happy. I think,' he said, 'I could make you happy. I know you would be my first, my one only love.'

He spoke with a certain contained emotion, that utterly bewildered the girl. She did not dare to laugh—she did not want to laugh any more. She did not know what to say; she was touched, incredulous, bewildered. She gave him one frightened glance through her tears. He looked almost fierce, so much was he in earnest.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UMBRELLA.

THE sun was all shining into the little hut. Some peasants in their Sunday best were trudging past the open door; their wide umbrellas were open, for the rain was still falling through the sunshine, quick and soft, in gold showers that sparkled as they fell. The pretty green creepers shone through the bright halo—a dazzling picture in a rough framework of beams.

Seeing her move, Rickets put himself in the doorway. 'You shall go,' he said, 'if you will but give me some sort of answer.' Then he went on earnestly. 'Indeed, it is not impossible that you will love me some day; and when people love each other, looks and age matter little: nothing matters,' said the little man, with a stamp of his foot upon the shavings.

'Don't you think so?' said Sylvia, doubtfully; she was thinking of her own stupidity as she spoke.

'I see,' said Tom, sadly, 'that my proposal offends and grieves you. I will go, since you desire it, and leave

you for ever.' There was a moment's silence: the two people stood waiting while their fate was being spun.

'But I have no umbrella,' said Sylvia, looking about her.

Was she as silly as she appeared to be? Tom Rickets' face changed a little, and, with a faint smile, he said, 'Mine is a large one, and you will be quite dry, if you will honour me by accepting its shelter.'

Sylie came shyly forward from among her shavings, as sweet an apparition as ever stepped out of a woodman's hut. She tied the strings of her round white hat, and wrapped her little black cloak more closely round her slim shoulders. 'Won't your dress get wet?' he asked; and Sylie obediently gathered up the long white folds; and so they proceeded for a few moments in silence.

Rickets wondered whether it was to him, or only to his umbrella that Sylie had entrusted herself. He tried to look at her face again, but it was downcast, and she never raised her eyes.

Tom Rickets walked silent, looking at the long slender hand holding the bunch of muslin folds. He knew that, as far as worldly advantages went, he was what is called a good match, and that it was unlikely her father should object to his mean appearance, with all the noble old elms of Dorlicote Manor to give him dignity. But he did not care to woo his lady through so fierce a mediator as the Colonel. He wanted her from herself to take him as he

was, of her own free will, and not because it was another person's desire. From the first moment he had seen that sweet, childish, troubled face, he had felt an irresistible longing to brighten, to shield that sweet young life. He loved her, loved her voice, her eyes, her simpleness, and unconsciousness of beauty. If she were but happy, and no longer afraid, she would be another being.

They had crossed the Devil's Bridge, and climbed the hill, and taking a short cut to the hotel, were crossing an open field, quite near home by this time. They neither of them spoke.

The sound of a luncheon-bell that reached them from above brought them back to every-day again. Sylie started; she turned white, then red.

'Oh, what *shall* I do?' she said, very agitated. 'I must run. Let me go. Mamma will be wondering.'

'Listen,' said Rickets, holding her back. 'One word before you go. I am going away, Miss Sylvia. I am obliged to return to India for a year. Will you come with me? will you trust yourself to me?'

'Oh, no, no,' said Sylvia, 'unless—unless papa desired it.'

'That is not what I want,' said Rickets, angrily; 'and yet'—and he held her fair passive hand, and sighed—'if not *now*, when I come back in a year, will you then consent of your own free will—consent to let me love you,' he

said, looking with all his kind heart in his little eyes. They seemed to grow quite big as he looked.

Sylvia stood trembling and wondering still. Suddenly she gave a horrified scream. 'Look! look! Papa,' she cried.

Poor Sylie! There were the Colonel and Quince coming together towards them; they were not twenty paces off. 'Oh, what is she not telling him!' cried poor distracted Sylvia. 'Oh, he has come back. What has happened? Oh, he will never forgive me!'

Rickets did not even turn his head. 'My answer,' he said; 'my answer, dearest Sylvia,' and he looked steadily into her face, and held her hand firmly in his.

'Oh, thank you; no—yes—anything—in a year,' cried Sylvia, all agitated.

'And you will listen to no one else in the meantime,' said the jealous little man. 'You have promised, Sylvia.'

'Have I? Oh, yes,' said Sylvia, desperately escaping.

She was gone; a flash of white through the green. She had flown up the little side path that, fortunately, led straight to the inn.

Rickets met the Colonel very coldly. He felt too angry with him at the time to enter into any explanations. He had Sylvia's promise, that was enough. 'Are you looking for your daughter?' he said very stiffly when they met. 'She is just gone home. I was fortunate to meet

her standing up from the rain, and to be able to lend her my umbrella.'

'Foolish girl, she ran off from her maid,' said the Colonel.

'It seems her maid neglected her duty, and refused to attend her,' Rickets said, looking at Quince. 'I heard some one speaking very insolently, though I did not know who it was at the time.'

Quince nearly turned black in the face. 'What do you mean by taking away a respec'ble woman's character?' she shrieked. 'How dare you?'

Rickets turned away haughtily. Something in his manner seemed to say more than his words expressed, and the Colonel, who was a gentlemen after all, looked round at Quince in high displeasure.

'What is this?' he said. 'Go home. I will see you later.'

CHAPTER XII.

MISS WILLIAMSON TRIES HER HAND AT DESCRIPTION.

St. Pierre lies a little on one side of the busy road that leads from Geneva to Chamonix. The diligences stop where three roads divide; one goes to Chamonix, one to the Etablissement deep in the heart of the mountain, another climbs the hill upon the side of which the little village hangs. A little village with a shining leaden church-steeple, and a torrent and many pine woods. There are Sophy's gables, of which she sent us so many sketches last year, and the wide wooden balconies overhanging the green precipice.

In these little mountain valleys of Savoy the streams go rushing over granite rocks and through the green lights and gloom of the rustling banks. Here and there a mountain ash burns above the spray, fir trees shed their cones, flowers lie upon the moss, strawberries spring up crimson and fragrant and scented with pine. On Sundays and saints' days the church bells come jangling from the steeple overhead, and echo from rock to rock; we have to raise our voices if we are wandering by the torrent and

would be heard above the din of the bells and the waters. Perhaps a peasant woman trudges past with heavy steps, and gravely looks at us from beneath her black frills, and greets us with a 'good day.' We can see the village and the steeple where the pine trees divide, and high, higher still, the snowy line of dazzling crests silent upon the blue. But that is a region far away and out of reach. Down below the road travels on, and we along the road, through changing lights and scenes. The sense of these distant worlds, so near and yet so unattainable, seems to make the shade of the pine trees more gentle, the opal horizons more distant, and more lovely. I think it is this sense of mystery unrevealed, yet present to our minds, that makes each place so beautiful in these ice-bound regions, and that seems to strike the solemn chord of the unknown to come, with the actual moment that pervades all highest beauty and emotion, and which, in some strange way, vibrates straight from our hearts to nature, from our life to the great life about us.

Even in people's faces, who does not know that intangible difference between beauty with a future, and beauty that lies placid and calmly spread out before one? I have seen the difference in the same face at different times. In a certain sweet vacant oval, for instance, as I saw it first at Lulworth Hall, and as I saw it again, the other day, brightened, all alight, when we joined the Kings at St. Pierre a week ago. My poor Sophy cannot

look what is in her, at any time, in any place, in England or abroad; she can say it sometimes, paint it more or less prettily in water colours, or play it on the piano. But Sylie, as they call her sister, the owner of the vacant face, can *look* now and then—not always—look so that you never forget the depth and lovely tenderness of her expression. How quickly years pass! H. and I are so used to them by this time that we scarcely note them as they fly, carrying all their inextricable tangle of past memories along with them. It was not so when we were Sophy's age and Sylvia's. Then, each year was itself distinctly defined, full of moment, standing out among all others. It is only twelve months since we last saw Sylvia at Dorlicote. I scarcely recognised her when we met last week on the little terrace in front of the inn. She looks worn, perhaps, in other ways she is wonderfully changed and improved. There is an expression of repose, of intelligence, that I never remember. She came into the room neatly dressed and smiling; she actually showed me the way to a certain little bridge I once knew and wanted to see again. When I speak to her now, she answers coherently and to the purpose. She has an original view of things at times, which is quite her own. She is not what you call a practical woman; but her speculative faculties are far more developed than when I last talked to her.

There is a great change, also, in her father's manner. He is gentler, and seems proud of her beauty and bright-

ness. Mrs. King tells me, in confidential whispers, of the many adorers who have come forward—an Italian prince at Geneva, a captain at Brighton last winter. There is a poor young Swiss painter at the table-d'hôte who stops on here day after day. He is evidently awaiting his time. Every day the fat waiter rings the bell at eleven and at five with a savoury tinkle, and we all come into the bare little room, bowing politely, and taking our accustomed places. The large, straggling Swiss family piles its alpen-stocks in the corner of the room (they fall with a loud crash during breakfast).

We are a quiet little company. Sylvia is our one star as we sit along the table. People who came to the village bring neither dazzling toilettes nor great expectations; bachelors are rare in these quiet little *pensions*—old maids, quiet middle-aged people, large and noisy families frequent them.

In the middle of the table there is a basket of flowers —alpen-roses when they are in season; sometimes the waiter varies the natural flowers with paper ones. A little trap-door in a cupboard opens into the kitchen, from whence come the dishes hot and smoking and liberally dispensed. We fare very well at the Hôtel du Mont Blanc. Our cook told us yesterday with pride that he had once prepared a dinner for Baron Rothschild. He is here, like ourselves, for change of air, and to take the waters. Out of compliment to our nationality, he prepared an enormous

plum-pudding on Sunday, at which poor H. gazed in horror.

Last night, when the sun set, a great writhing serpent-cloud came from behind the snowy Bréja, and hung mid air, while the evening lights poured gold and colour upon all the rocks and the valleys and mountain tops. Then a clear crescent moon dawned high overhead, and soon began to shine silver and crystal among waning daylights. The line of rocks to the west was softened to purple mist. The snow mountains reflected the dying rays of the sun we could no longer see; the stream rushed through the twilight; the crickets whistled loudly in the shadows. Sylvia was sitting at the far end of the gallery, where a lamp was swinging, and where we were all assembled. She had been very silent, with her head upon her hand. When she spoke at last, the Colonel, who was reading his paper by the light of the oil lamp, looked up, and asked what she was saying.

'I only asked if to-morrow was the third, papa,' said Sylie.

'It may be the thirty-third for all I know,' said Sophy. 'Doesn't one lose count of time here, Miss Williamson?'

'It is a coin that goes very quick,' said I; 'and counting it over doesn't make it last any longer, I am sorry to say.'

'Longer!' said Sylie. 'I think time is so very long.'

All night the bank of vaporous clouds spread and

spread. While we were lying sleeping in our little wooden rooms, sudden chills awoke us—sudden storms of rain falling, or far-away echoes of thunder playing organ notes among the hills. I lay in the dark listening, while the lightnings flashed, beating time to the thunder tune, lighting up my little room, my workbox: my black gown looked like a nun as it hung in the corner. The storm was at its height, when a bell rang and a knocking began at the front door. I heard voices in the room next mine; a door opened above, another below; footsteps went along the passage; for some minutes the whole house seemed awake, then all was suddenly silent again, except for the storm.

This morning all the blue cotton umbrellas were out in the village street, the sun came out about nine o'clock, and then I saw Sylie in her white hat pass the window, walking slowly up the street with a letter in her hand. Isidore had been to the post for the early letters. About ten o'clock I heard Colonel King calling, 'Sylvia! Sylvia!' and Sophy looked into the saloon to see if her sister was there. Sophy seemed flushed, excited, and very important.

'Is anything wrong?' I asked.

'Nothing wrong,' said Sophy, 'only we can't find Sylvia; she has run off as usual, and papa has had *such* a strange letter from Mr. Rickets. Where *can* she be? And she hurried away.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD CHRISTINE'S ORACLE.

WHERE was Sylvia? She was walking along by the pretty green wood where she had lost her way the year before. She, too, had had a letter, which she did not dare open, although she guessed from whom it came. All this year she had tried not to think of that strange eventful day when Rickets' sudden apparition had so moved her. It had all been so vague, so like a dream. It was a joke she sometimes thought; he had been laughing at her, and she—she had been forward, unmaidenly. She could not bear to think of it all. It made her feel too ashamed. Even to Sophy, Sylvia had never confessed the whole of that morning's history. Only when other people came, the Count, the Captain, some instinct made her shrink from their advances. No one spoke as he had done. They proposed to the Colonel, they proposed to her mother, but their words did not touch her heart. She did not love Rickets—how could she love so ugly a little man?—but she liked to think of his love for her. It gave

her courage, when she was frightened, to remember that one person did not despise her.

She no longer feared her father's impatience as she had once done, she respected herself more, little by little new understandings and gifts had come to her. All this year she had pondered it all, and though she told herself it was a dream, it was a consoling dream, and one which helped her in many waking hours. And now he had written! It was no fancy. Here was a letter directed to her in a bold handwriting that she knew, though she had never seen it before. She did not dare open her letter. She would take it, she thought, to the carpenter's hut; perhaps *there* she might be able to find courage to read what he had said.

When Sylvia reached the hut, she found a great hammering and sawing going on, and shavings flying, and a carpenter and a carpenter's boy shouting to one another, and a dog barking. It was impossible to remain there; and, somewhat disappointed, she passed on, following the little winding path that leads to the Etablissement, by a leisurely down-hill zig-zag. Sylvia followed the road quietly; she knew her way by this time and was in no fear of losing it. But at a turn of the road, passing among the shady green avenues, she stopped surprised by sudden loud voices and clatterings at her feet, by fragrant steams of cooking rising from below and coming from behind a thick clump of pine trees.

Sylvia advanced a few steps further, and she found she had come to a place that looked straight down from a height into the back court of the Etablissement, where the kitchens are built. The fires were burning; the cooks were running backwards and forwards and calling to one another; constellations of saucepans were gleaming through the open doors and windows; a little cook-boy was climbing up the steep mountain side, gathering mint and wild laurel to flavour his dishes; a woman was whisking salad in a wire basket; a poor little chamois was hanging up by its heels; the chief, in his white robes, was directing, beating time with a long wooden spoon to the concert. The earth seemed to have opened suddenly, and all these people to have sprung into existence. While Sylvia stood staring, surprised, old Christine's donkey, with some traveller's luggage on its back, came toiling up the steep path, followed by the old woman; who carried a great branch of pine, to brush the flies off the donkey's ears, and who smiled a greeting to the pretty lady in the white hat and blue tippet.

'What is going on?' asked Sylvia.

'They are cooking the breakfast for the diligence,' said old Christine. 'It has just come in,' and she pointed to the luggage. '*L'Anglais* has come,' she said, nodding slyly. 'Eh, who knows—it is, perhaps, a wedding feast that they are preparing? I have good eyes, though I am so old and laborious. I saw you last year by the carpen-

ter's hut. He gave me five francs when he went away. He is generous, and not so ugly as some,' and Christine went on her way, nodding her trembling head and smiling still.

Poor Sylvia stood aghast. What had she heard? What was this? Was this the talk of these gossiping old women? She had but little time to collect her thoughts, for in another moment there stood the owner of the portmanteau, right in the path before her, looking browner, happier, all dressed in white linen, but otherwise unchanged. He stopped short, his whole face lightened.

'Mr. Rickets!' Sylvia faltered, starting back, and then she began to blush deeper and deeper beneath her white hat. She would have turned and fled, as was her habit, but her strength failed, and she could not escape.

He held out his hand in silence, but she did not take it. Rickets looked frightened. 'What does this mean?' he asked anxiously. 'Sylvia, have you forgotten everything,—this day last year? I have travelled a thousand miles to find you, and is this all? These cold looks—Have you forgotten your promise?'

'You cannot call that a promise,' Sylie cried, greatly agitated. 'Last year I was so young, so silly. This year I am older and wiser. You know it was not a promise!'

Rickets turned very pale. 'Of course not if you wish it broken. Of course you are free,' said he in a low

voice. 'Last night, when I walked up through the storm, and heard you were come, I thought—I hoped. Now I understand;' and he turned paler and paler. 'I was a fool to think that one woman beyond all women might value something more than outward looks. Yes, you are right to send me away,—to say, "Go, you ugly, misshapen wretch. How dare you think of love? It is your doom to be despised—it is your fate. How dare you complain? Offend not a lady's eyes."'

'Oh!' said Sylvia, greatly shocked, 'it is not *that*, indeed it is not that.'

As she spoke she looked at him, steadfastly and pitifully; and as she looked the light came into his face again; for a moment he had been overwhelmed; his strength and courage came back.

'Sylvia,' he said passionately, 'you are too wise to trifle with such love as mine. I have at least taught you that. Don't keep me in suspense . . . No, that was no promise—but will you promise now . . .?' Then, with an odd half-smile he said: 'If you could love me enough, you would not think me so very ugly.'

'But I don't,' faltered Sylvia, and while she was speaking still she saw a bright transfigured face before her, and kind eyes full of love and protection looking into hers. . .

Suddenly, she knew not how, she had surrendered. There are times when time is nothing, when feeling out-

runs time and seasons as they flow; so people need but an instant to live or to die; so the first beam of light reveals the hidden treasures of the secret chamber; suddenly the light had shone into Sylvia's kind heart and shown her the treasures hidden there, and told her that she returned the love that had been hers from the first.

Rickets told his betrothed he had walked over from Geneva the night before. It was he who arrived in the storm. He could not wait, he said, for the diligence in the morning. The diligence brought his portmanteau which he had been to fetch, for he would not present himself in his travel-stained garments. He had written her a letter from Geneva. She held it still in her hand, but she had no need to read it now, and indeed she keeps it still unopened and treasured away.

It was like their last walk, only infinitely—a whole year and a whole future lifetime—happier.

Once when a shower fell they stood up under a tree. How fresh it was beneath its shelter! The plums hung upon the branches; the scent came fresh through the golden rain; the wheat-fields lay yellow on the mountain side; the potato-fields close at hand were in flower; the châlets of the village stood dotted here and there among the comfortable hay-ricks and bean-fields. Here came a patch of flax; farther off some bright green crop was sliding to the valley. The distant sound of the flail reached their ears. It was a saint's day; but winds and clouds

know no saint's days, nor does Nature herself, except hours such as this, when human hearts dream of the divine in life.

Sylie stood under the plum tree, admiring, as Tom bade her. Everything seemed illuminated—his kind face, her waving hair, her white dress, every blade of grass, every insect as it floated by, the plums, the tangle of branches and leaves overhead.

They went home to breakfast at last and to tell their news; but the Colonel had read Rickets' formal letter of proposal for his daughter's hand, and was not anxious because Sylvia delayed.

JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK.

ARGUMENT.

JACK was a poor widow's heir, but he lived as a drone in a beehive,
Hardly a handstir a day did he work. To squander her earnings
Seemed to the poor widow hard, who raved and scolded him always.
Nought in her house was left; not a cheese, not a loaf, not an onion;
Nought but a cow in her yard, and that must go to the market.
'Sell me the cow,' cried she; then he sold it, gad! for a handful—
Only to think!—of beans. She shied them out thro' the window,
Cursing him: hied to her bed, there slept, but awoke in amazement,
Seeing a huge beanstalk, many leaves, many pods, many flowers,
Rise to the clouds more tall than a tall California pine-tree;
High as a lark was Jack, scarce seen, and climbing away there.
'Nix Dolly Pals,' he shrilled; she beheld his boots disappearing;
Pod by pod Jack arose, till he came to a pod that alarmed him.
Bridge-like this long pod stretched out and touched on an island
Veiled in vapour. A shape from the island waved him a signal.
This was a shining maid, and Jack with an humble obeisance
Crawled to the maid. She exclaimed, 'I gave those beans to ye, darling,
I am a fairy, a friend to ye, Jack; see yonder a giant
Lives, who slew your own good father, see what a fortress!
Enter it, have no fear, since I, your fairy, protect you.'
Jack marched up to the gate, in a moment passed to the kitchen
Led by the savoury smell. This giant's wife with a ladle
Basted a young elephant (Jack's namesake shrieked and turned it).
Back Jack shrank in alarm: with fat cheeks peony-bulbous
Ladle in hand she stood, and spake in a tone of amusement:
'Oh! what a cramped-up, small, unsesquipedalian object!'
Then from afar came steps, heavy tramps, as a paviour hamm'ring;
Out of her huge moon-cheeks the redundant peony faded,
Jack's lank hair she grabbed, and, looking sad resolution,
Popped him aghast in among her saucepans' grimy recesses.
Then strode in, with a loud heavy-booted thunder of heel-taps,
He that had awed his wife—her giant, swarthy, colossal:
'I smell flesh of a man; yea, wife, tho' he prove but a morsel,
Man tastes good.' She replied, 'Sure thou be'est failing in eyesight;
'Tis but a young elephant, my sweetest lord, not a biped.'
Down he crooked his monstrous knees and rested his hip-bones,
Called for his hen, said 'Lay;' so she, with a chuck cock-a-doodle,
Dropped him an egg pure gold, a refulgent, luminous oval,
That was her use: then he pushed her aside, cried, 'Bring me the meat now.
Gorged his enormous meal, fell prone, and lost recollection.

Jack from a saucepan watched his broad chest's monstrous upheavals:
'Now for it, hist!' says Jack—'coast clear, and none to behold me,'
Since to the chamber above the flush-faced dame had ascended.
So Jack jumped to the ground, and seized the plump, money-laying,
Priceless, mystical hen; ran forth, sped away to the beanstalk,
Sprang down pod by pod, with a bounding, grasshopper action,
Lighted on earth, whom she that bare him, fondly saluting,
Dropped a maternal tear, and dried that tear with her apron,
Seeing him home and safe; and after it, all was a hey-day,
Lots of loaves, and tons of cheeses, a barnful of onions;
Cows and calves, and creams, and gold eggs piled to the ceilings.
Ah! but he found in a while his life of laziness irksome.
'Climb me,' the beanstalk said with a whisper. Jack, reascending,
Swarmed to the wonderful isle once more, and high habitation,
Well-disguised; and marched to the fortress, passed to the kitchen
Unseen, hied him again to the saucepans' grimy recesses,
Peeped out into the room. The plump wife, peony-bulbous,
Toasted a great constrictor; he rolled in vast revolutions.
Then strode in, strong-booted again, with a roar, the colossus:
Called for his harp, said 'Play.' So this, with a sharp treble ting-tong,
Played him an air, a delightful, long-drawn, exquisite hymn-tune,
Played him an air untouched (the strings, by a mighty magician
Wrought, were alive). Then he shouted aloud, 'Wife, bring me the meat now,'
Gorged his elongate meal; the snake in warm revolutions,
Making his huge throat swell, disappeared like Man's macaroni:
After, he yawned and snored, fell prone, and lost recollection.
So Jack seized the melodious harp, and bolted. A murmur
'Master, master, a rascal, a rascal!' rang thro' the harp-strings.
Jack to the beanpod sprang with a leap, and desperate hurled his
Limbs in a downward, furious, headlong precipitation,
Touched upon earth, up-glanced; his foeman's ponderous hob-nails
Shone from aloft: down crashed big pods, and bean avalanches.
'Haste mother, haste mother, oh! mother, haste, and bring me the hatchet!'
Cried little Jack. So at once she brought him an axe double-handed.
Jack cleft clean through the haulm; that giant desperate hurled his
Limbs in a crashing, roaring, thund'ring precipitation,
Fell to the ground stone-dead with a thump as a thump of a meal-sack.
'I'm your master now,' said Jack to the harp at his elbow;
'There's your old 'un! of him pray give your candid opinion!'
Sweetly the mystical harp responded, 'Master, a rascal!'

CHAPTER I.

JACK'S FATHER.

THERE is an undeniable fascination in pastoral music, in smock frocks, in porches with green curtains of leaf and tendril to shade the glare of the summer's day. These pretty old villages, whatever their hidden defects may be, have at least the innocent charms of confiding lattice, arched elm boughs, and babbling streamlets. Perhaps the clear water rushes under a wooden bridge, washing by the Doctor's garden wall, and past the village green (shady with its ancient elms, beneath which the children play and the elders stretch their tired limbs), and travelling on into green summery dells of clematis and willow light. In feudal countries a strong castle dominates each nestling hamlet; here the crowning glory of the place is the Squire's house upon the hill, or the church tower, with its flight of birds and musical old clappers sounding at intervals, and dunning and dinning the villagers to their wooden prayers, and the Squire and the Doctor to their fusty baize cushions.

At a little distance from Hayhurst (a village that answers as well to this description as any other) is Cross-lane Station, where the train stops of summer evenings. When you alight upon the platform, you find yourself in a little crowd of village folks, market carts, and baskets, and wayfarers already beginning to disperse: some follow the road that runs past pasturing slopes where the flocks are wading; others climb the stile and dip into clover-fields; one little cart with a shabby white horse takes a country road, bleaker and less frequented. It pushes under a railway bridge, and runs by flats and reedy marshes, and past deserted-looking farms towards an open country, where willows start into line, and distant downs mark the horizon, and far-away villages stand black against the sky.

The boy with the dark eyes, who drives the cart, is my hero, young Hans Lefevre; that low house by the common is his home; and the distant village is Foxslip, of evil reputation. It had a bad name once: thieves and wicked people were supposed to live there, and to infest the moor. Many stories were told of dark doings at the dreary little inn, which still stands on the edge of the common. Until a few years ago, there was neither church nor school, parson nor schoolmaster, in Foxslip parish. The chief landowner was Farmer Lefevre, who had no money to give away; he had bills out, people said, and was hard pressed to meet them. He was a flighty, irreligious sort

of man. He did nothing for the poor; he was absorbed in his own schemes. He scoffed openly at the High Church revivalisms which were going on at Hayhurst under the Squire's patronage. On Sundays, when the wind blew westward, he used (so it was said) to go out shooting crows in church time, knowing that the Squire could hear the report of his gun as he sat in his pew, and Sir George Gorges swore he would convict him.

Farmer Lefevre was almost always in hot water with one person and another: with the Bishop, whom he accused of every crime of which a bishop is capable; with the Squire, with whom he had a standing dispute about the lease of his best fields. His father had bought them from the Squire's father years before, at a time when old Sir George was in urgent need of money. I say bought, but the old Squire was too proud to convey the land to a stranger absolutely. He had granted a lease for a term of years, and somehow or other the lease had been lost; but the farmer declared that the Squire could produce it if he chose to do so. It was certain that the first Sir George had received a good sum as if for the purchase of the land, and that neither he nor his son had ever asked for any rent since the bargain was made; except indeed the almost nominal sum which the farmer paid year by year. Lefevre had also quarrelled with his wife's family. Mrs. Lefevre had been a Miss Hans, and made an unfortunate match, her relations said—so did not she—for if ever two

people were happy together, Farmer Lefevre and his wife were happy and tenderly united. The farmer, although somewhat abrupt in speech and manner, had the ways of a gentleman. He was a grand-looking man; his ancestors had come over from Normandy, and he had inherited dark eyes and pale high-cut aristocratic features, that might have belonged to Squire Gorges himself, with his many quarterings and co-heiress grandmothers and great-aunts. Young Gorges, the Squire's son, with his fat, blonde, Saxon face, looked far more like a farmer's son than did Hans Lefevre, our hero, the only child of this rebellious and unpopular yeoman. Everyone had a stone to throw at Farmer Lefevre. It is true he paid higher wages than the neighbouring employers; but he was a stern master, and expected a cruel day's work. He was so strong himself, he did not know what it was to feel for others. He was absorbed in his selfish money-making schemes, people said. But in all this they judged him hardly; he was working for his wife and his son and for the people who spoke so harshly of his life. He was draining and planting at great expense, and he had borrowed money to turn a feverish marsh into wholesome crop-land. He vowed he should pay himself back in good time, and would live to a hundred years, if only to spite Sir George; but his reckoning failed, he died at forty, quite suddenly, out in the hay-field one day. He had been helping his men to lift a great stack of straw, and he must have strained him-

self in some fatal way, for he put his hand to his heart and fell back in the sun. And at that minute the farm and fields, and all his hard work and hard savings, went back to the Squire on the hill side. Sir George insisted that the lease was ended by Farmer Lefevre's death, and there was no one to dispute him. Hans was but seventeen; his mother was no match for the Squire, crushed as she was by her trouble. A great shadow of sorrow came into the little farmhouse—a passionate grief uncontrolled, sobbed away in burning tears. Emelyn Lefevre was an impulsive woman; in her own pain she forgot how cruelly she was racking the one heart that yet beat for her. She clung to Hans, who said nothing as he sat pale and shivering by her side, softly stroking her burning hands, while the poor widow poured out all her sorrow and felt relieved. But as for the boy, dearly as he loved his mother, he had loved his father still more, and this death sunk deep into his soul and into his life. He vowed to himself to win back his inheritance, but for the present he could do nothing but wait. He knew, although the others had not known, of his father's generous schemes for the people round about. He knew all that the farmer had had at heart, and the future that he had planned when the lands were ready, and the people had learnt to earn their daily bread in honest independence, and not to receive it as a dole, crumb by crumb. But all this was over now: the cottage (it scarcely reached the dignity of a

farmhouse) was their own; but the fields went back to the Squire, who offered no compensation for the money which had been sunk upon them Sir George liked to square his accounts, and he felt that he had more than made it up with man and with his conscience when he built the pretty little Gothic church at Foxslip, out of the very first year's profit from the reclaimed marsh meadows; he also erected the schools and a comfortable parsonage for his second son, who was just married, to his father's content. And so it happened that a parson had come to Foxslip, and a pony-carriage and a parsonage, and by degrees followed a pretty schoolhouse, with weathercocks and an inviting porch open to the road-side, and so it came about that Lady Stella teaches in the schools daily, and helps the schoolmistress with her influence and advice. And the children come regularly in the pretty little red cloaks Lady Stella has given them, and Mr. Gorges being a man of eloquence and enterprise, the devil is supposed to be exorcised from Foxslip. Some people say that being ousted in one place, he has crossed the common and taken up his abode at Hayhurst, hard by among the elms and pastures; we all know that he is said to patronise railways, and Hayhurst is nearer the station, and more convenient in many ways. Also the 'Green Ladders' public house, with its lattice windows and shining oaken bar, is a far more cheerful place than the dreary little 'Blue Lion' at Foxslip.

CHAPTER II.

JACK'S MOTHER.

SOME foolish people let their lamps go out for want of tending, but there are others who choke theirs with too much oil, or who snuff them out nervously at the very moment when the light is most wanted. Mrs. Lefevre was one of these: an incomplete woman, active, impatient, incapable, with a curious power of rising to the occasion and lifting herself out of difficulties (probably because she did not realise them fully), which might have overwhelmed a less sanguine nature. For many of these difficulties she had only herself to blame, and it must be confessed that she did this unsparingly, making matters only worse for poor Hans by her fits of remorse, each of which generally lasted until she had something new to lament over—the Squire's shabby conduct, and her relations' unkindness, and the price of coals, Hans' idleness, and his indifference about a profession, and her own incapacity. Why was she only a woman? And then she would look about through her tears to see what was to be done next. Very often it would have been far better if she had done

nothing at all, but that was not in her nature. Hans could give her no advice. He knew nothing of the world, and he appeared to be in a sort of stupid dream for some time after his father's death. His mother worried at life, and found a mysterious comfort in the process, but the boy had inherited his father's reserve. He could not put words to feelings as his mother did. She never guessed how much he suffered, nor that his nerves had received a shock which he did not recover for some years. He grew taller and leaner every day, his eyes looked dark and troubled; people and things in general seemed to jar upon him. He tried to attend to the farm, but he soon saw that it could not pay, and his interest failed day by day. His nights were disturbed, and it required all the self-control he was capable of to go on as usual. Mrs. Lefevre suspected nothing; and yet she was a loving-hearted woman; she would have done anything in the world for Hans except leave him in peace—that indeed would have been against her nature—and while blaming her let us remember that Emelyn Lefevre had as much a right to talk as Hans had to be silent. I venture to put in this plea, though I know it is not a popular opinion.

One resource young Lefevre had, although his mother did her best to interfere with it: he was very fond of reading. He would sit contentedly hour after hour, poring over his father's old books. Mrs. Lefevre was proud of his application, but still more annoyed by his supineness

at his age—nearly nineteen—and doing nothing for himself. Even Mrs. Plaskett had remarked——

'Mother, how can you!' said poor Hans, turning very red, and burying his face in the book again.

Mrs. Plaskett was the grocer's retired mother, from Hayhurst, a good old creature, with a lame leg and a pony-carriage, who was glad to do anybody's errands. She came over next day with a petition from her niece, the housekeeper at the Hall. 'Five pound of fresh butter, Mrs. Lefevre, if yo' can do it, and any eggs ye can spare. Lady Gorges' hens be not a-layin', and the bride is expectit to dinner. She is to stay up at Stonnymore till her own house is ready, pretty dear. Miss Gorges do seem as pleased as her brother a'most, so my niece tells me; they are nigh of a hage; the two young ladies and Miss Gorges must be dull o' times. 'Tis a dull house—Susy do feel it so, and talks of bettering hersel'. Sir George he were allus a fault-finder. My Sammy tells me as how they calls him the Hogre at the "Green Ladders." 'Tis that Tom Parker, I'll be bound. Mrs. Millard should set her face against such rudeness. But ye seem busy to-day, ma'am, and put about; shall I come back again?'

'No, I am not more busy now than usual,' said Mrs. Lefevre, looking up and down, 'but I cannot trust that girl of mine to do a thing, and I have been running everywhere for Hodgetts. There is something wrong in the cowhouse with the calf.'

'Is not that Mr. Hans under the hoak tree? why doan't ye send him to see to the poor beast?' said Mrs. Plaskett. 'I took a good look at him as I passed. I didn't know him, ma'am. He will be as foine a man as his father befoar long—woo-a, Jinny.'

Poor Mrs. Lefevre's eyes filled up. 'He will never be what his father was,' she said despondingly, as she turned to go into the house.

'Eh! poor soul, I can feel for ye,' said Mrs. Plaskett, shaking her black silk bonnet. 'An' yet I have been doubly blessed in Tommas and Sammy too, but I fear yon lad an' his books is no great stan' by.'

'My son is all I could possibly wish,' said Mrs. Lefevre, with some dignity, and she went off, not without some misgivings, to look for the eggs. Mrs. Lefevre had no false shame, and disposed of her eggs and butter with perfect self-possession to the people round about. Neither she nor they ever forgot that she was a lady born, and she might have sold ten times the amount of farm produce without loss of prestige. But, alas, the hens, uninfluenced by proud descent, forgot to lay for days together. Something seemed wrong in the henhouse, and indeed the whole farm seemed to be dwindling and vanishing away. Hodgetts, the farm-servant, was not clever with cattle. Mrs. Lefevre sometimes suspected his honesty. Betty, the girl, was also more stupid than anyone could have believed who had not seen her ways. If matters

did not mend they would never be able to live there, and what was to happen to them then? Mrs. Lefevre, going into her dairy, found that the eggs had been mixed, that the butter was not set, nor the milk-pans washed out, and Betty was discovered absorbed in the contemplation of a pair of new boots with heels, the dream of months past. Mrs. Plaskett had to drive off without her complement of eggs, and Mrs. Lefevre, vexed, and flushed, and worried, walked across the field to the shady oak, underneath which Jack was lying.

'Jack, where is Hodgetts—what are you about? Do go and see to the calf. How can I do everything while you lie here at your ease? It is my own fault, I know. I have indulged you and spoilt you, and now you think of nothing but your idle pleasure—*Mill on Liberty*—what are you reading? What good will it do you? How can you spend your time on all this rubbish? I know I do not do my duty by you, but I do think you might try to be more of a comfort to—to——' Poor Mrs. Lefevre burst into tears.

Hans looked very red. 'I came here to get out of Mrs. Plaskett's way. I'll go and see to the calf, mother. I'm very sorry.'

'Yes, dear, do go,' sobbed Mrs. Lefevre. 'Oh, that your father were here; I cannot remember what he used to give the cattle. I forget everything, and perhaps it is as well that I *should* forget. Oh, what a life this is!'

The poor soul leant against the tree sobbing bitterly. Life was only Emelyn Lefevre for her as she stood there in her black dress, with her widow's cap falling off. Life is only ourselves over and over again. It is you, for you, and me, for me—our own perceptions meeting us again and again. Life was Hans Lefevre for the young fellow striding off on his way to the stable; a young world, troubled, rebellious, full of tender sympathy; apathetic, at times, but only at times: it was also moved by many a generous, yet silent determination and youthful impulse. Hans possessed a certain sense of self-respect and reliance, in which his mother was wanting: her very humility of temper was against her happiness. She was a good woman, conscious of failure—not the less conscious of it because she had really tried to do her duty.

CHAPTER III.

THE COW.

THE poor little calf gave a gasp and died, and Mrs. Lefevre bursting into fresh tears, once more began to lament her husband's death and her hard fate. 'He might have saved the poor thing,' she said. 'Hans! the farrier says that bottle of brandy was the worst thing we could have tried, but one had to try something, and Hodgetts is so dull, and indeed I meant for the best.'

'Of course you did, mother,' said her son, trying to comfort her, for he saw she was in real distress. 'Everybody loses a calf now and then.'

'Only we can't afford to lose a calf, and other people can,' sobbed poor Mrs. Lefevre; 'listen to that poor cow bellowing, and Sir George's agent wanted to buy them both only last week. Why did'nt I let them go, only I could not bear to have dealings with that man? There is Patch coming for that money to-morrow, and Hodgetts' wages are due, and . . .' Hans put his arm round her and pulled her out of the stable into the little orchard, where the apple trees and the sunset were making a glow

overhead, and the flowers and green and fallen twigs, and the tangle of daisies and bright-headed buttercups, were soft under poor Emelyn's footsteps. She trod heavily, as desponding people do, while Hans, looking down into her tear-stained face, was thinking how he could help her best: she had no one else to take care of her. If only he could get work! Their farming was utter delusion, and could never be anything else. If his mother had but agreed long ago to give it all up, it would have been the better for them both, and so he tried to tell her as soon as she could listen to him. 'I have calculated it all over and over again,' he said. 'We could make it pay still if we had the marsh-fields that Sir George has robbed us of, but without the land it is impossible. Look here, mother,' and he would have showed her a paper. 'No, no, I can't understand—I don't want to see,' cried Mrs. Lefevre, with sudden exasperation. 'It is all Sir George's wickedness. It would not matter so much if only one could trust to Hodgetts and Betty; do what you like, dear, anything, anything, what do I care so long as you are happy?' and bursting into tears once more, she ran into the house and closed the door behind her. Poor Hans went and leant over the paling, feeling anything but happy, and staring at his own calculations.

Farming! he hated it 'It is a sort of slave-driving,' thought the young fellow, 'for those who can't afford to pay for their own conscience.' If only he could get other

work. They could certainly sell the live stock and pay their debts and have enough over to look about. The cottage was their own, they might dismiss the servants. There were grave suspicions against Hodgetts' honesty. 'His honesty!' thought Hans, bitterly, 'on twelve shillings a week, with ten children and a sickly wife. Suppose he does steal the eggs! Doesn't Sir George steal other people's property, with his twelve thousand a year? Will he have to answer for Hodgetts' ill-doings as well as his own? Not he. He is driving us from our home, but no one will blame him.' Hans, in a fury, crumpled up the paper in his hand and tossed it far over the hedge. It fell at the feet of a woman who was trudging out afield with a child crying at her skirt, but she did not stoop to pick it up. Presently an old man bent double came slowly crawling along with a load of stones. He saw it gleam in the sunset, took it up, smoothed it out, turned it over and put it down again. Hans meanwhile was pacing up and down the little box walk. He had dwelt upon the wrongs of life until sometimes all the goodness and peace in the world seemed poisoned away. Tom Parker, his confidant down at the village, was more philosophical: 'It ain't no good fretting,' he said; 'look at me! While such people as that are in power and lord it over our 'eads, nothing can be done. But wait a bit—see if we don't get our turn; let them go a little farther and they will over-reach themselves, see if they don't—

mark my words.' Tom Parker was very proud of his words, and was always calling upon Hans to mark them. Before long he hoped to have a wider audience. Hans did not quite follow all his mysterious hints, and could not wait to be indignant until his feelings should be paid by the column, as Tom assured him the *Excelsior* was prepared to do. (The *Excelsior* was a weekly newspaper that was to put everything straight, a forthcoming organ, a voice for Tom Parker, only waiting for the necessary funds to commence its triumphant career under the editorship of William Butcher, the well-known agitator.) What was a newspaper more or less to Hans? He was in a rage, as many boys and girls have been before him, because they cannot command the things of life, because other minds, schemes, injustices run their course, and they can no more stop them than they can stop a miasma or poisonous vapour from spreading when once it has risen. But Hans forgot that injustice cannot exist without justice, that there are good things and good people thinking and doing their best, as well as bad ones at their worst. Life would be sad indeed if we did not look sometimes beyond ourselves and our narrow ken. Here is one who made an effort and mourns himself a failure; here is another who unconsciously acts upon the first man's effort and counts himself successful.

As Hans leaned his disconsolate elbows upon his garden gate, he suddenly heard an unusual sound coming

upon the soft gusts of the evening breeze. Was it a charm—was it a shepherd piping his flock? It was only a woman's voice, softly chaunting a sort of wild singing-tune, that shrilled and vibrated. The pathetic voice seemed to touch him curiously. He had never in his life heard anything so strange and so sweet. Then he saw two ladies come slowly walking along by the fragrant hedge that skirted the garden. One of them had pulled some of the wild roses that grew by the corner yew tree—the other held her hat in her hand, and had turned her face to meet the sweet gorse and clover-scented breezes from across the common. There she stood, a sunlit nymph, dressed in that pale Japanese silk which ladies have worn of late years. She sang a few notes more, then she looked round, and stopped short. 'Don't let us go on; there is that man looking over his gate, papa dislikes him so much.' She spoke in a clear and vibrating voice; it was very low, but there was almost a metallic ring in its distinctness as it reached Hans' quick ears; her companion answered, but Hans did not care to listen, and with one steady look, he walked away from the gate, rather to the ladies' consternation.

'He must have heard me—did you see how he looked? Oh, Stella, what shall I do?'

'I daresay it was chance,' said the other consolingly, as she turned away. 'You have dropped a paper, Lina,' she continued, pointing with the rose branch.

The lady called Lina looked down, stooped and picked the paper up and turned it over. 'It is very like my writing,' she said.

On one side were some calculations, wages, wear and tear so much, net balance—50*l* deficit. Then a scrap of poetry, copied from some book—

O end to which our currents tend, inevitable sea.

'What is it all about?' said the young lady, walking on with the paper in her hand; 'here is some more poetry;' and then in that curious low voice of hers she began reading some lines that poor Hans had written down, though he had certainly never meant anyone, except perhaps Tom Parker, to see them, least of all Lina Gorges, the golden lady in the sunset lane. She grew paler and paler as she read on. The verses were a tirade against her father, supposed to be spoken by the guilty Hodgetts.

They were written in the Hodgetts' dialect, and contained a poor man's remonstrance, very simply worded, but not the less telling for that. It was a rough imitation of the work of the great master-hand of our own time. Hans had called his doggerel 'A Midland Labourer,' and the metre was that of the Northern Farmer.

Hodgetts told his own story and his troubles, and appealed to the great landlord to be content with all that he

had already devoured—their daily bread, their strength, their own and their children's independence. He had reaped where he had not sown. Had he not taken the farmer's own, and mulcted the widow and the fatherless? Would he not spare the common and the elm trees that people said he was now about to enclose? Apollina's hands were trembling long before this; her heart was beating with passionate indignation. She could read no more. 'How dare he; how dare he!' she cried, panting with sudden furious emotion. 'My father take what was not his? My father take another man's property? Stella, you do not believe these cruel, slanderous lies? It is a wicked lie. It is a mistake—it is——' Her voice suddenly failed, and Lady Stella looking up, saw that her face was crimson, and that her head was hanging, and that great tears, like slow rain-drops in a thunderstorm, were falling from her eyes. Something had changed her; all the fire was gone; all the anger. 'We must send this back,' she said in an altered voice that sounded faint and toneless somehow. 'Stella, will you see that young man? Will you give it him? I cannot. Tell him to destroy it —never to let anyone see those cruel words.'

The two ladies walked home in silence after this. Stella, the daughter-in-law, knew only too well what foundation there was for the slander of which Lina complained. Only that morning her husband had spoken to her with some indignation of his father's proposed raid upon the

common, where from time immemorial the widow Barnes' hens had clucked unmolested. They met Sir George at the park gate. He chucked his daughter under the chin, but she only fixed her strange grey eyes upon him without smiling, and looked steadily into his face

'What are you thinking of, child?' said he. 'Come home. Mr. Crockett is here. I brought him back to dinner.'

Lina gave a little shudder, but did not answer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OGRE'S HARP.

How shall I describe Sir George's daughter? She herself was somehow puzzled to find herself so unlike her home, her education, her father and mother. Where had she come from? From which of the framed grandmothers had she inherited her peculiar organisation? They had not been chary of their gifts. One had given her her name: a legacy for which Appolina Gorges was by no means grateful. She called herself Lina, and made the best of it; another had bestowed upon her her beautiful golden hair. A third had bequeathed her beautiful hands and arms, and a harp and a voice of rarest and sweetest quality, although it had the peculiarity that some notes were almost entirely missing. Lina could not consequently sing all sorts of music, Scotch and Irish melodies suited her best. Her brother once said laughingly to his wife that Lina herself reminded him of a stringed instrument more than anything else, 'a harp or something of the sort,' said he. 'I mean no harm,' said the Rector. 'I'm very fond of Lina: she is a good girl and a very pretty one, and leads a

dreary life.' This beautiful creature stood somewhat above the usual height of women. She was slight and straight. Even in the days of crinoline she never gave in to the fashion. Her clothes used to fall in long folds to the ground. She had regular features: some people said they were inanimate, and reproached her with being stiff and motionless, and also with having one shoulder a little higher than the other and a head too small for her body. But say what they would, they could not deny her beauty; she herself did not care for her own good looks, but she was pleased with her beautiful hands and feet, and her serenity was not above being tempted by smart little slippers embroidered in gold, and quite unsuitable for anything but the glass cases in which the shoemaker kept them. Those who called her stiff did not know her, for she was one of those shy, but responsive people, who do not make advances; she was spirited, with a touch of melancholy: sometimes silent for hours together, sometimes suddenly excited. A word was almost enough; she would respond to a touch, as people say. It was a nervous and highly-strung nature, too impressionable for its own happiness in life. At times Miss Gorges seemed to wrap herself up in an outer case of abstraction. Very impressionable people are obliged sometimes in self-defence to oppose some sort of armour to the encroachments of too excitable feelings, and abstraction comes in the place of other qualities to give rest to exhausted nature. Lina was not perfect I must admit; she was cross sometimes, and

very sensitive to the changes of weather; she was obstinate with all her sensibility, and would harp upon one idea; a storm set her quivering, and almost beside herself; even a heavy fall of rain would put her nerves ajar, and untune her for several hours. She was not very active in her habits; her father would have liked her to show more taste for country pursuits, but she rarely went beyond her pretty morning-room or her wood on the lawn outside. This walk with her sister was a very exceptional event, only Lady Stella could have brought her so far from home. Lina did not seem very happy. She was not so happy as she ought to have been, but then it was the habit of the house to be silent and constrained, especially in Sir George's presence, and Lina had lived there for twenty years, and had learnt the habit. Lady Gorges set the example. She was afraid of her husband; even for her children's sake she had never attempted to hold her own with him, and if people weakly give in time after time, deceiving themselves and their own inclinations, acting long-continued and tacit lies against their own natural impulses, Nature revenges herself upon them in one way or another. Lady Gorges had shrunk from righteous battle; now she was a sad and spiritless woman; her life was one terror; her husband had some curious influence over her which seemed to paralyse the poor thing: she would start and tremble when he spoke to her suddenly. She was a pale, stout woman, with fair hair, and some remains of beauty still. Harold, her second son,

resembled her. He was her favourite child; Jasper, the eldest, looked too like his father for the poor lady to feel quite at ease in his company. Lina also greatly preferred Harold to her eldest brother; she was not a little excited when she heard of his engagement. And the very first day that her brother's wife came in smiling, all through the great folding drawing-room doors, Lina was very sure that she should love her sister-in-law.

As for Lady Stella, she was a happy woman, people said; there were few who did not love her. She was brown-eyed, russet-haired, tall and slender. She was something like a Raphael lady who is, I believe, at this very minute hanging to a nail in the National Gallery; but if one may judge by the placid looks of that serene Madonna, the Englishwoman had far more animation and interest in her expression. Shc seemed to be able to bear with life gently, and yet to hold firmly withal to what she had once determined—she had that *pearly* manner some women have, a tender grace, and a certain charm of gentle confidence in her destiny that won all those whom she chose to elect to her friendship. Poor Apollina Gorges often envied her in a responsive, admiring sort of way. Most of all she envied her perhaps for the ease with which she held her own. Lady Stella was younger than Miss Gorges, but she came of a large and united family. Brothers and sisters, and sympathies of warm friends, often stand in the place of years of experience, and give the confidence that others only gain

with age. Lady Stella knew far more of the world outside Stoneymoor park gates than did poor Miss Gorges at the time when those gates opened wide to welcome the sunshiny bride to her husband's home—so for want of a better word he called it.

Lady Stella brought a good portion of brightness and sweet temper, but not much beside. Mr. Gorges was not ungrateful for this pleasant dowry. He was surprised and enchanted by the way in which she took her place, meeting his father's gloomy authority, his mother's silence and coldness, and Apollina's alternate reserves and outpourings with perfect sweetness, and a courage he had never attained to. If Lady Stella's courage failed her in the first days of her stay at Stoneymoor Court no one ever knew it, except perhaps Lady Mary, her confidante, an invalid sister, who had long been established as the family prescriber and sympathiser. Sir George was a bully by nature. What else could he be, with his fierce eyebrows, his thin lips tightly drawn over a set of gleaming teeth, and his tendency to suppressed gout? Nobody had ever said 'No' to him. The first time that Lady Stella contradicted him, with one of her pretty little smiles, there was a sudden terror and silence in the room. Lady Gorges gave one scared glance at the butler, in her confusion. Sir George, who was crunching a lark, gulped the little creature, bones and all, in surprise. Lady Stella went on as if she noticed nothing, looked up at him with those clear

eyes of hers. 'I think Harold ought to investigate the subject,' she said. 'Mr. Bridges is a very respectable man. He came down to my father's village, and I know my father attended the meeting.'

'Lord Milwarden can do as he likes,' shouted Sir George. 'My tenants know that I am not to be trifled with.'

CHAPTER V.

JACK MEETS A FAIRY GODMOTHER.

FOXSLIP WOOD in summer time is a delightful place—green to the soul. Beyond the coppice here and there where the branches break asunder, sweet tumults of delicate shadowy hills are flowing to gleams of light cloud; while the pine-tops and the nut-leaves rustle, the voices of birds, of insects, or streamlets break the silence, tinklings come from the flocks afield.

The wordless distraction was very grateful to Hans as he came striding along the narrow pathway, crushing the leaves and driving occasional fir-cones before him. He had been to the agent, and had sold his poor cow and the white pony, and he was disconsolately crumpling the notes in his pocket, and thinking of the agent's disagreeable sneer as he had handed them over, of his mother's reluctance, of trouble ahead, of the squirrels up in the trees. . . Hans was young enough to be able to think of the squirrels as well as of his cares. We older people, I think, make a mistake in thinking care more sensible and important than it really is. We let the squirrels leap by unnoticed, while

we are anxiously pondering upon the ditch, six fields off, perhaps. Poor Hans went on his way, whistling the tune he had heard Miss Gorges singing the day before. He was a slim, brown-faced young fellow, dressed in the not unbecoming dress of a country farmer. He had a short coat and leather gaiters, and a sprig of heather in his felt hat. He carried a stick in his hand. He might have been anyone—leather gaiters are not distinctive, and are as useful to a duke as to a farmer. Hans walked along as if the whole wood belonged to him, instead of a tumble-down cottage and forty pounds in county notes, to keep him and his mother for all the rest of their lives. A little adventure befell him presently. As he reached the end o the wood he thought he heard his name called, and looking round he saw a lady sitting under the great Spanish walnut tree that guards its entrance (you can see it for miles across the common). A lady or a fairy is it ?—Alas! there are no real fairies in such stories as mine.

If this is a fairy, she is the size of life, and looks very like Lady Stella of the Madonna face. She is dressed in the quaint and fanciful costume that English ladies were beginning to assume some ten years ago. On her dainty head a high-crowned hat is set. The feather is fastened by a star, that glitters and shines like steel in the sunlight; her pretty white saque is looped over a crimson satin petticoat; her pretty little feet twinkle in buckles and high-heeled shoes; in her hand she holds a long-sticked parasol,

which she is waving to attract the young man's attention. Hans comes up with wondering eyes, for he recognises one of the ladies he saw go by his gate—not she who sang, but the other. He had been thinking of them only a minute ago, although he had not expected to meet either of them so soon again. There sat the lady on the moss, comfortably installed, leaning against the trunk of the tree.

'I wanted to speak to you,' she said, in a very sweet voice. 'Come here. I shall not detain you a minute:' and as Hans stood before her, looking surprised, she blushed and explained with sweet upturned eyes, 'I should have called at the farm to-day, but I have to go to the duke's christening fête. I am waiting for my pony-carriage; I walked on; it is to catch me up. I have something of yours, Mr. Lefevre,' and Lady Stella then put her hand in her pocket and pulled out an envelope addressed to Hans, in a handwriting so like his own, that he was still more puzzled. 'My sister-in-law, Miss Gorges, picked up a paper, and read it by mistake, and asked me to ask you——' (The fairy became a little embarrassed.)

'I am the Rector's wife,' she said, starting afresh. 'It gave Miss Gorges the greatest pain to think anyone could so misjudge her father, whom she loves dearly, and she requests you to burn the poem, and to remember in future that Sir George has only done what he felt right and just, and that it is dangerous to draw cruel and hasty conclusions.'

'Right and just!' burst out Hans. 'Do you know the stories people whisper, do you know the state of things all about? Do you know that Sir George has turned us out of our land?'

'But surely, Mr. Lefevre,' said Lady Stella, kindly, 'if your father had a lease——'

'A lease,' interrupted Hans, 'do you know what sum my grandfather paid for it? Has Sir George ever told you the terms of the bargain?' and then Hans named a sum so large, that Lady Stella looked down.

It was most uncomfortable and distressing. The poor lady was longing to think well all round, but she began to be troubled. Her husband, to whom she had spoken, had looked very grave and said that he knew nothing about the transaction, but that he often took a different view from his father upon business questions; Lina's passionate asseverations had reassured her, and Lady Stella had meant to scold the boy gently, listen to his story if he had one, and explain away any misconception.

'But surely,' she faltered, changing her ground, 'you cannot think it right for a young man as you are, to attack an old man like my father-in-law, impute every dishonourable action to him, turn him into ridicule. You have given Miss Gorges more pain than you can have any notion of, and to me also.'

'As for the verses,' said Hans, loftily, 'I never meant anyone to see them; I have no other copy, and I'm sure

I do not know how they came into Miss Gorges' hands. You say they are enclosed in that'—as he spoke he tore the envelope into two or three pieces. 'You cannot expect me,' he went on with some rising anger, 'to give up my honest right to my father's and grandfather's property; and when the day comes I shall most certainly try to claim it. I am very sorry indeed,' he added, turning a little pale, 'to give Miss Gorges any pain; I will never do anything that is not in fair open dealing: but I and my mother are ruined. We have hardly anything in the world left of all that was ours: I must think of her as well as of myself. You cannot ask me to make no effort to regain what I sincerely believe to be our own.'

Lady Stella was more and more surprised and embarrassed. Her own brother could not have spoken better, more quietly, more courteously; with all her liberality she was half angry at the young man's persistence, and yet half won by his evident sincerity and moderation of manner.

'I am sure you are mistaken, and some day you will be sorry for your unjust suspicions,' she said, warmly; 'but anyhow, if ever I or my husband can be of any help to you in any way—will you'—her voice softened, she put out her kind hand—'count upon us? He might advise you, and I have some little influence; you must be started in the world and get on better than you ever could now. I am sure that before long you will retrieve your—your fortune,

and make your mother as proud as I hope my son will some day make me.' She said it so sweetly, that Hans was completely disarmed; he could not find words to thank her.

The pony-carriage came up before he could speak. 'Thank you for tearing the verses,' she said, starting to her feet; 'I shall tell my sister. And mind you come and see me. I shall expect you. Good-by, Mr. Lefevre,' and with a kind, grave smile, the fairy drove off, brandishing her whip.

CHAPTER VI.

BEANS AND TALK.

HANS walked on homewards, still turning the notes in his pocket and thinking over this curious little interview. Had he pained them, those kind ladies? Should he go and see Lady Stella? He thought not; but he kept wondering what she was like at home. That sweet young lady! who would ever dream of imputing ill-meaning to her?

Hans seemed to be in demand. As he passed the 'Green Ladders,' he saw Tom Parker, who had been away for some time, and who was now safely returned, standing with his hands in his pockets and his favourite stock in his button-hole, and a hat cocked on one side of his red shock head, looking more vulgar and important even than usual. 'Here, Lefevre, I want to speak to you'—and stepping forward, he beckoned him mysteriously a little on one side. It was to tell Hans something that he had already told him more than once. There was to be a meeting of agricultural labourers held almost immediately in the bar-room of the little public. 'We have secured

Bridges; I am to say a few words myself,' said Tom. 'We asked Mr. Gorges, but I don't suppose he will care to come—too near home,' said Tom with a chuckle. 'You had better look in, Lefevre; what is the use of shutting your ears and eyes to what is happening? There's nothing to be done single-handed, union is everything; why, I don't despair of seeing our man in Parliament before we've done. By Jove, Lefevre, if I were you, I shouldn't lag behind. I have put your name down as a member of our Hillford Club. The original Reds and Greens you know. We have got our Organ at last. . . . I didn't tell you before, that is what I have been about.'

'An organ,' said Hans, bewildered.

'Yes, weekly; first-rate—the *Excelsior*. There was an indirect reply to my leading article in the first number—see *Daily Telegraph* of yesterday—mentions no names, you know, but it is easy to know who it is aimed at.'

'Do you write the leaders?' Hans asked, somewhat dazzled.

'That I am not at liberty to say,' said Tom. 'The editor alone knows and is responsible for the authorship of each article; Butcher—don't you know him?—a very remarkable man, I can tell you. He wants to make your acquaintance; he was very much struck with a conversation I repeated, and with your views upon agriculture. He is here.'

Hans blushed up; it was flattering to hear that such a man as Mr. Butcher was interested in him.

'Do you think,' he asked hesitating, 'that if I were to send a few notes I have put down, there would be any chance of your getting them inserted into the paper?'

'Can't say, I'm sure,' said Tom, absently looking up and down the road. Five or six labourers were coming up in their smocks and Sunday coats.

'Hillo! the parson, by Jove!' said Tom, suddenly.

'These are the people whose bitter tyranny brings things to our present state,' said a small man, coming up in shiny new clothes. 'I don't think your young ogre would look so sleek if he could hear some of the things that will be said to-day concerning him and the old one—eh, Parker?'

Hans looked up as the new-comer spoke, and saw the new clergyman coming along the lane. A little procession was following; labouring men stumping along, or hobbling or trudging, according to their various loads of years, rheumatics, cares, hard work. The new-married clergyman seemed pretty free as yet from any of these overweights; and able to bear his quarter of a century with ease and hopefulness; his heart beat warmly, the sunlight was in his path, and his steps came straight and prosperous. Tom with his hands in his pockets jostled somewhat rudely against the incumbent as he passed and sent some

dust flying. Hans blushed up and made way with a little bow. He had not bargained for rudeness. He would have liked to apologise as he thought of the gentle look of Lady Stella's brown eyes.

'Is the meeting to-day?' said Mr. Gorges to Hans.

'We are all on our way there now,' said Hans. 'I am glad you think of coming, for it concerns us all.'

Mr. Gorges looked up surprised as his wife had done. Hans answered him in a quiet voice; but it was clear and well modulated. He spoke as if he had been one of the prosperous ten thousand.

'I had not really—a—made up my mind about going,' said Mr. Gorges, looking a little embarrassed. 'You see my position is difficult; I don't want to show any bias one way or another,' Harold went on floundering, for he saw a look of something like scorn on the young man's dark face, and a sneer in that of the two others standing near. Hans looked away from Harold Gorges' well-shaven and calm physiognomy into the first battered face that went by; what chance had these poor clowns, measured against such prosperous plausible antagonists? For an instant he had thought this man was bringing his prosperity to the help of these unfortunates. He had misread the kind glances.

'I beg your pardon,' Hans said; 'I thought clergymen were by way of showing a bias in favour of those who want helping. I didn't know; I am only a farmer, and a

very unsuccessful one;' and he walked on and caught up Tom Parker, who was laughing to himself.

'Well! There ain't anything to be got out of *them*; I could have told you so, only you wouldn't believe me. Cold-blooded sneaks, hard-hearted tyrants, we will teach them our power. Once set the *Excelsior* at 'em, you will see the old ogre down on his marrow-bones yet,' and Tom cocked his straw hat and marched in through the narrow passage which led to the old sale-room at the 'Green Ladders,' where a deal table with a glass of water and a few rickety old benches were prepared.

'Here, sit down by me,' said Tom. 'I am a-going to say a few words; but what's words—perhaps a dozen on 'em may 'ear them and all the good seed's throw'd away. Our organ is the real thing to give us the power, and we will use it, see if we don't. . . . Look here, Hans,' he said confidentially. 'I am speaking as a friend; you take your four ten-pound shares—I know you have the money by you—we give you six per cent. interest to begin with, and a fair percentage of all the dividends, besides paying you for any occasional leaders or lighter articles that you may wish to contribute. Your fortune's made; you are no farmer, my boy; forgive me, you never will make anything out of the land; but you have brains, and you know it, and take my advice and look to them for the crops.'

Perhaps if there had only been Tom Parker and

Butcher the agitator, in his shiny new clothes, to address the meeting, this story would never have been written. Hans was sorely tempted by Tom's proposal; but the thought of his mother's distress held him back, and yet, was it reasonable to refuse a good offer, made by a friend, because she was nervous and Tom's manners were bad? Hans looked up at his friend as he stood gasping and spluttering over his speech, grateful for a prompting word from Hans, who had quickly thrown himself into the spirit of the thing, and felt ready to make a speech himself before Tom had finished his first sentence. When Parker finished, to a tune of hobnails and shuffling, Mr. Butcher, the spirited proprietor of the *Excelsior*, took up the theme. He was an agitator by profession, and made his living by the wrongs of others; he was secretary to the Reds and Greens, a newly organised Radical club. His glib fluent sentences rolled out as a matter of course. Bitterly true they were, but as some one has said somewhere some truths seem almost like falsehoods in some people's mouths. Hans knew every detail to be accurate in the main, but he listened unmoved. The unfairness and one-sidedness of it all repelled him. He did not care to throw in his venture with such a man as this, and he grasped his forty pounds tight in his pocket.

Butcher sat down, mopping up his face, and then Mr. Bridges came forward. Hans had heard of him before, and looked up with some curiosity.

This was a middle-aged strong-set man, with a powerful honest face and a powerful honest voice. He spoke with a slight country accent that was not disagreeable; on the contrary, it seemed to give point and character to his sentences, as they came forth slowly and thoughtfully, rolling true to their mark. It seemed to some of those who listened that it was not one man speaking; it was the voice of a whole generation of men and women who were telling the manner of their daily life, of their daily wants.

The man who was speaking had lived through it all himself, and had felt hunger and biting cold, and seen his little children suffer. He had been in and out of other cottages besides his own, where the same cruel laws of want, cold, hunger, were imposed by circumstance, by custom, by thoughtless platitude. He had seen little children overtasked and put to labour unfitted to their strength; he had seen women working in the fields, and their little babies of three weeks old brought out through the bitter wind, because the father could not, toiling early and late, earn enough alone for the home, not even if he had worked all the twenty-four hours of the day. He had seen men crippled and starved into premature old age, and as he spoke more than one of those present glanced at old Frank Conderell, crawling in, doubled up, and scarce able to stand: not yet sixty years old, though he looked a hundred. Bridges went on, not very bitterly,

but clearly and to the point; it had been the custom to underpay the labourers on these estates, but there was no reason why the custom should continue. These men had been systematically underpaid, underfed, from no special unkindness and ill-will, but from the habit of the employers and the habit of resignation. But why should they resign themselves any longer to so cruel a state? why consent to work for wages that did not represent the work nor anything nearly equivalent? Others had found ont the strength of unity before this. 'I myself have been without a loaf o' bread to set before my little ones, dismissed at a minute's notice, and with no redress. The magistrates won't convict the ma-asters, we have tried it again and again. Life is hard for the labourer and wages are hard, and what barely kept us in life a few years since is starvation and nakedness now.

'Why, a pair of boots cost fourteen shillin', and a man's wages in some parts are twelve and thirteen shillin' a week.' Then with a sudden burst, 'I have seen people sore put to it silent and bearing their sufferings,' cried the orator, for he was an orator, 'and my heart has bled for those unhappy men, doomed to toil, to lives of suffering and insufficiency. People talk of the glories of England; these are among the sorrows of our most unnappy country. And now to-day I call upon all of you men,' he said, 'to u-nite, for the good of your children and of your country and your self-respect and liberty, and

to demand the increase of wages which most justly belongs to you.'

Nobody moved or spoke for an instant Mr. Gorges had slipped in unperceived in the midst, and was sitting listening—a sense of wrong had come to some of the poor fellows present for the first time. Joe Blake got tipsy at the bar before he went home on the strength of his newly-awakened rights. Butcher beckoned Hans aside as the meeting dispersed.

'You have heard him,' he said, eagerly; 'will you join us? will you help these poor creatures and benefit yourself at the same time? There is the organ waiting; it only wants wind and muscle, and money is muscle. . . Give me your hand; Parker has vouched for you. A salary of a guinea a week to begin with, and six per cent. for you if you join us.'

Bridges came up at that moment with his earnest face.

'Are you a farmer and on our side, sir?' he said; 'I wish with all my heart, there were more such as you.'

Long after the meeting was over, when Hans came home, pale and moved, in the twilight, and knocked at his mother's door, she ran to open and met him with open arms. The time had seemed long, and her heart had been yearning for him.

'Well, dear,' she said, eagerly, 'where have you been,

and you have sold the cow—and have you got the money?'

'Better than that, mother,' said Hans, with beaming happy eyes. 'I think I see my way to a livelihood; and to something I can do, to a comfortable provision for you.'

'What is it, dear?' said the widow, eagerly.

Jack put his hand into his pocket and brought out four slips of pink paper: they were four shares in the *Excelsior* newspaper. Mrs. Lefevre eagerly ran to the light with them and then gave a loud cry of despair. . . The poor thing in her disappointment crumpled up the papers and threw them away from her right out of the open window. 'Oh! Hans, Hans, my poor foolish boy, what have you done?' she said, bursting into tears.

'Don't be unhappy, mother,' said Hans, 'wait and see. I wrote my first article in Tom Parker's back shop.'

When Hans awoke next morning, Tom Parker was standing outside tapping at his bedroom window. 'Here are the proofs of your report of the meeting,' he cried; 'the man sat up all night to put them into type. It's a first-rate thing. Butcher is delighted with it.'

CHAPTER VII.

WIDOW BARNES' HEN IS SCARED.

Lady Stella Gorges to her sister, Lady M. Milwarden.

Foxslip Rectory, September 18th, 18—.

I HAVE not much to tell you since I last wrote, my dearest Mary. Dear Baby is well, the carpets and curtains are spreading by degrees, the garden is getting into order, the new cook is a success. I am quite charmed with my pretty new house and Sir George's kindness and liberality. He has just been here promising to build me a dairy. I cannot imagine how it was I was so afraid of him when I first saw him. Harold and Lina had made me shy, I think, but although my husband laughs at me for my cheerful views of life and people, he owns that he did not do his father justice, and I do begin to hope that in future they will all understand one another better than they have done hitherto.

'Sir George is peculiar, but I am sure he is really warm-hearted; he has been most kind about the Rectory —consulted us about everything, done everything we

wished, and let us come here just when we began to feel the want of a home of our own. Of course we were very happy at Stoneymoor Court, but I must confess that it is a relief to be in one's own house, to ring one's own bell, order one's own dinner, open the window, send for Baby at all hours of the day, and trot out the little ponies at five minutes' notice instead of solemnly making up one's mind to a drive the day before. Lady Gorges came yesterday with Lina. The visit went off very well; we had five-o'clock tea in the morning-room; the view was looking lovely, the purple moor, the nut woods, the cows munching in the meadow, the distant farmhouse buried in its elms and stacks: Beancroft Farm, where that poor man used to live who wanted to go to law about his lease. Did I ever tell you about him? I cannot exactly understand the rights of the story; I am afraid Sir George is a little difficult to convince at times. The widow still keeps the farm, though the land reverted to us—to Sir George, I mean, at the farmer's death, and the lawsuit was avoided. The Rectory is built upon one of the fields, and the garden (which certainly is wonderfully productive and succeeds admirably—we have been most fortunate in our gardener) was drained out of a marsh by Lefevre himself—I felt grateful to him to-day when I saw Baby's ecstasies over the honeysuckles. (I assure you that children begin to observe everything at two months old.) I should like you to know a young man, the farmer's son,

who interests me very much. He sometimes comes to see me. I am sure he will make a name for himself. He is very clever and very handsome; he writes in a horrid vulgar newspaper called the *Excelsior*, which has had the most extraordinary success. Sir George cannot bear the sight of it. He wrote an angry letter to the editor, a short time ago, which all the county papers took up, and they say it nearly doubled the sale of the *Excelsior*.

'Poor Lina misses Baby dreadfully, she says. Lady Gorges is not fond of children. Dearest Mary, do they wind her up on Tuesdays with the clocks? (Hushsh, you say.) Peggy brought Baby in to see her grandmamma, and Lady Gorges never looked at the child. No wonder poor Lina looks sad sometimes, and my heart aches for her when I think of our own mother, and all the love and warmth of our old home. It was everywhere, and lasted all day long; it tucked us up in bed, and seemed to come shining in of a morning. Dear Mary, I like to think my children will inherit some of our mother's love, though they will never have known her.

'You will be interested in our schools; they are beautifully arranged, with dear little children (only that I have such a horror of Baby's catching any infectious illness, I would let him go and play with them when he is older). Hannah Berry is a real treasure of a mistress. I have only seen her once. She came to thank me for furnish-

ing the room in the schoolhouse, but I told her it was your doing, not mine. It is very nice to see people who have seen you, dearest Molly. When am I going to see you? Meanwhile I shall go on writing; but must finish for to-day, for it is post-time, and Lina is coming for me in the pony-carriage.

'Your S. G.'

Letters are story-books written for one particular person, and story-books attempt, in some measure, to represent life without its attendant restrictions of time and space. What are miles to the writer? years fly before his pen, estates are enclosed within the fold of a page. Three months had passed since Hans purchased his pink shares from Tom Butcher. To everybody's surprise, the *Excelsior*, as Lady Stella said, was a most extraordinary success. The Reds and Greens were a powerful community; and their paper, which had been on the very verge of ruin when Hans' forty pounds came to start it again, was now a recognised power in the county, paying ten per cent. dividend. Hans had certainly, as his mother said, wasted a great deal of time over his books; it turned to some profit now that he was farming ideas and pens and ink instead of oats and beans. He was himself more surprised at his own success than anybody else.

There are some people who all their lives long have to be content with half-brewed ale, the dregs of the cup, en-

velopes, cheeseparings, fingers of friendship. To take the lowest place at the feast of life is not always so easily done as people imagine. There are times and hours when everybody is equal, when even the humblest nature conceives the best, and longs for it, and cannot feel quite content with a part. You may be courageous enough to accept disappointment, or generous enough not to grudge any other more fortunate, but to be content demands something tangible besides courage or generosity.

Hitherto Hans had been anything but happy. He did not like his work, or his position in life: he had grown bitter over the wrongs he saw all about, and could not mend. Now he seemed to see hope dawning; but his mother's incredulity was very distressing. She loved him, but could not believe in him. She admired in secret, but certainly was not encouraging. *He* want to improve the condition of the people round about! As if an inexperienced boy could do anything. Why had he not tried his hand upon Hodgetts? How could he write about things in which, he must confess, he had failed utterly himself? 'If reformers would only try their hand at their own work. . . . Your dear father never neglected *his*, nor complained of his position,' continued Mrs. Lefevre, with a sigh. 'And I'm sure I never regretted the step I took when I became a farmer's wife, and left my own sphere' (Mrs. Lefevre's sphere had revolved in

the pestle and mortar of a suburban apothecary); 'but indeed, dear, I have often thought how much better it would have been for you if your father had married somebody more able to be of use, more—What is that singing, Hans?'

'It is the chapel, mother,' said Hans. 'This is their Thursday meeting.'

Hans and his mother had been wandering along the road, in the cool of the evening, and had gone on farther than they intended. Hans was bareheaded. Mrs. Lefevre had only thrown a shawl over her head; it was early still: the meeting was held at six o'clock, and it had only just begun as Lady Stella and Miss Gorges drove by in their basket-carriage, on their way home to dinner at the Rectory. Lady Stella stopped the horse for an instant to shake hands with Hans and to speak to Mrs. Lefevre. 'We were to have met Sir George,' she said; 'have you seen him go by?'

Mrs. Lefevre said 'No' so curtly that Lady Stella blushed and drove on; as for Miss Gorges, she had not spoken, but had sat quietly looking at Hans with curious pale blue sympathetic glances. Somehow they seemed to magnetise him; a vague something seemed to strike some mysterious chord as he watched her. When Lady Stella blushed, her sister-in-law turned pale, and Hans thought that in her eyes there seemed to be some odd look of understanding, of apology; it must have been fancy; it was

too absurd. She seemed to be there even after the carriage had turned the corner of the lane, still looking at him.

'She looks proud enough,' said Mrs. Lefevre, indifferently; 'what is it they are singing?' Hans did not answer. The two had stopped for a minute to listen to the hymn which came mingling pleasantly with evening honeysuckle and clover scents. It was a cheerful sort of strain; old Caleb Ferrier, the shepherd, seemed to be leading, and the whole congregation was joining in, nodding time and clapping books and elbows in the most inspiriting manner. These people were certainly singing their own song and praying their own prayers in this little square brick box, and asking for the things they really wanted for themselves and their families, instead of for those things which other people had thought necessary for them, as we sometimes do in church on a Sunday. Other people, such as archbishops who had never worked all day long in a stubble-field; high court councillors who had never eaten their wives' hunch of bread in their hungry need.

Tom Parker in a corner by the pulpit was very prominent, with a stock in his button-hole and a hymn-book, flourishing the time; he glanced over his shoulder at the open door of the meeting-house and caught Hans' eye, but he went on singing

'An' win our glorry crrowns,' shouted Tom in chorus, 'as we go marching on;' 'And we'll march, and we'll

march, an' win our glorry crrowns,' sang the old shepherd and the clerk, and the minister and Mr. Nangles, and his three daughters. The whole chapel seemed inspirited by the cheerful tune, and if living a good life only consisted, as the hymn-books tell us, in marching about in bands to music, the congregation seemed well advanced on its way to the New Jerusalem.

Mrs. Lefevre felt she ought to say something to counteract the effect of the hymn tune, but somehow it had cheered her up too as she listened, and it seemed ungrateful to complain just at that moment: still she could not resist a little sneer at Tom Parker. 'Did you see him with that enormous nosegay?' she said as she walked away. 'How you can bear to spend whole evenings with him or that man Bridges at that horrid "Green Ladders," as you do—I am sure Sir George must think——'

'What do I care what he thinks—if he did think,' cried Hans. 'Bridges is a noble fellow, and if he had ten thousand a year he would do more in a week to set things right than the old ogre has done harm in all his wicked life.'

'Hussh!' said Mrs. Lefevre, and Hans, looking up, heard a horse's foot strike the road. It was Sir George, who gave a disagreeable sort of grin, showing all his great teeth, and rode on.

Sir George had delayed on the road—he had a special reason for delay—but now, leaving Foxslip behind him,

he went placidly journeying along the road. His well-equipped groom cantered behind.

It seemed an odd arrangement of fate by which all these tranquil and gentle things belonged to this fierce old man. Sloping shadows, waving coppice, soft prismatic tints and pasture-land and pleasure-lawn; the manor-house, rising above the elm heads, and the distant farms of which the gables were peeping through the nut woods. The very nuts in their little wooden cases were Sir George's, and the birds' eggs in their mossy nests. Little Jeff Ferrier, panting along the road from Hayhurst, had some of the Baronet's property in his trowsers' pockets as he scrambled out of the horse's way. Sir George threw him a copper—he was in an amiable mood. He had struck his grand blow, and would now prove to his tenantry that they could not hold revolutionary meetings with impunity on his estate. They incited his labourers to strike; did they? He would show them who was master, and that he was Lord of the Manor, and if he chose to cut down the trees and enclose the common for building purposes nobody could prevent him.

He was angry with his tenants, but something else had put him into good humour with all the rest of the world, with his own daughter especially, that morning; and Jeff Ferrier owed his copper to no less an event than an interview between Sir George and Mr. Crockett, the new owner of Trembleton Court, 'who had come forward in the most

gentlemanly manner, with an offer for Lina, said Sir George to his wife, 'and really Lina could not do better.'

Poor Lady Gorges! her heart failed her, for Lina had declared in secret that nothing would induce her to do so well for herself as to marry the owner of Trembleton, but Sir George knew nothing of this.

As he rode on along the lane and threw little Jeff Ferrier the copper, Jeff grinned as he ran on his way, and presently the little ploughboy came up to Hans panting and dusty. 'Be grandfayther in the-ar, I say? mother wa-ants him. I werr to bring im quick, and Mr. Parrrker tu.' Jeff Ferrier was ahead of the usual village urchins and could take a message on an emergency, but it was difficult to make out what he wanted now, so excited and breathless was he. 'The trees on the common, they'se cuttun our trees,' he repeated, with his little gooseberry eyes starting out of his head. 'They'se broake oop grandfayther's bench where 'a sits Soonday,' said Jeff, still panting. 'Goa and see for ye'sell, can't ye? Mother said some one were to stoap 'un.'

Hans began to understand, and without another word he walked back a few paces, and going to the chapel door, beckoned out his friend. Then Jeff was called up, and after a minute's consultation Hans and Tom Parker set off running across the fields. As the two young men hurried along in hot haste, they met Sam Plackett meandering

along the fields talking to his sweetheart; at a few words from them, he left that disconsolate damsel to follow as best she could, and set off running too. Hans hurried on first with set teeth and quick-beating heart. Were they too late?—As he reached the green he saw that his fears had been well founded; one great noble tree lay helpless, with all its shady branches outspread and quivering still, upon the grass. The men had got their ropes round a second: birds were flying from the branches, the hens and chickens were scuttling off, widow Barnes was weeping piteously and clinging to the bailiff's arm, one or two little children were looking on scared, so were a couple of young men from the public-house.

The bailiff paid no attention to widow Barnes, but a more serious obstacle standing in the midst of this group was the Rectory pony-carriage, in which sat Lady Stella. Miss Gorges had jumped out and was standing in front of the great fallen tree.

'My father could not have intended that you should do such a thing,' cried the girl in her ringing voice. 'Mr. Mason, I beg you as a personal favour to tell these men to leave off.'

'Yes, Mr. Mason,' cried Lady Stella, 'it must be a mistake.'

'I am sure, ma'am, my lady,' said Mr. Mason, turning distracted from one to another, 'I am very sorry, I——

Sir George was positive in his orders. I myself think it a pity; but——'

'A pity! it's a shame,' cried Miss Gorges, 'to cut down these noble old trees. I am sure no one has any right to do so,' she cried, more and more excited, in a vibrating voice.

'Ain't it a shame, miss?' sobbed widow Barnes, with many a memory in her old heart of young life and courting days, and long years passed beneath the shade.

The agent looked bewildered from Miss Gorges to Lady Stella, who still sat in the little carriage, to Hans and his companions, who were looking very resolute, and who had quietly surrounded the doomed tree and the men at work upon it.

'Here is Sir George, said Mason, much relieved and looking up the road.

Lina gave a little cry, and ran forward to meet her father. In her excitement the strings of her bonnet had come untied and were flying behind her mixed with her long golden curls. Hans never forgot her as he saw her that day. She was moved, thrilled out of her usual silence; as with clasped hands and streaming eyes she stood entreating her father to forbid the men from going on with their work of destruction.

'Nonsense, nonsense,' grunted the Baronet; 'why have you delayed, Mason? Miss Gorges does not understand.

Get into your carriage, Lina, and drive home. It is a matter of business. You have nothing to do here.'

Lina was trembling but she still persisted in her entreaties.

'Get into your carriage and go home, I tell you,' hissed the Baronet through his great yellow teeth.

Lady Stella bit her lip with indignation; Lina, paler and paler, seemed ready to faint.

'Papa, I——.' The words died away on Lina's lips, her father paid no heed to what she said, for something else now came to withdraw his attention. This something was no less than a reinforcement of the villagers with sticks and pitchforks, who had suddenly at a signal from Hans surrounded the remaining trees.

'This is our property, you have no legal right whatever for what you are doing. I defy you to prove your right to our common land,' shouted young Lefevre in a loud voice. His eyes were sparkling, his nostrils were open, his head was thrown back; no young warrior ever flew to arms with a nobler and more determined aspect. They all felt instinctively that Hans was their leader; he had got the men together, by magic almost, and now he stood among them alight in his youth and in the undaunted vigour of his generous scorn.

'You miserable fools,' he said to the woodmen, 'cutting down your own inheritance, coming here to spoil your neighbour's land. What has that man ever done for you

or for your children that you should consent to do this dirty job for him?'

'Go on with your work,' roared Sir George.

'The trees are sold, Sir George has contracted for them, and you understand a gentleman's word,' said Mr. Mason, still apologising.

Hans gave a glance of scorn and amusement, his men closed in, and one of the woodmen sulkily flung down his saw.

'I'll be d——d if I go on with this here job.'

The other two followed his example; in vain Sir George cursed and fumed at Mason.

'Come, Lina, come,' said Lady Stella of the burning cheeks, and Lina, deadly pale, turned round, and with downcast, shame-stricken looks got into the carriage again. As the two ladies drove off along the bend of the road which passed the place where the resolute young men were still keeping guard, Hans heard a low long sort of sobbing sigh that touched him profoundly.

Then, in a little more, the green was deserted, the widow's donkey came trotting back to its accustomed grazing place, the cocks and hens stalked about in their usual desultory manner, one great tree still lay on the ground, but the others were safe, and their murmuring branches seemed rustling with deep fresh life all that night, long after the moon had risen and stirred the shadows on the plain.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE OGRE'S CASTLE.

PEOPLE talk of skeletons in the cupboard. Lina's skeleton was not in the cupboard, but locked up in one of the square iron boxes in her father's study at home. He called the place his den. No housemaids were ever allowed to dust the room or put it in order. Lina was the only member of the household ever admitted, and, indeed, few people except Lina would have cared to spend much time there. It was a dreary sort of place; to say nothing of Sir George himself, lumber of every description lay piled in the corners, under the tables; ugly and forbidding things were scattered about; the room was close, with a faint smell of tobacco, of books, of mice; spiders roved along the ceiling, moths flew out of the corners, where from year to year clothes hung to pegs, and coats and hats were covered with dust. There was a rusty collection of pistols and foreign-looking weapons against one faded wall, and a case full of whips and heavy sticks. Along the chimney stood a row of stags' heads, opposite the window a great cabinet full of fossils, from which

toothless jaws were yawning, socketless eyes blankly glaring, thousand year old thigh-bones lying with peeling labels. The tin box was one of six in which Sir George kept the family papers, and it was supposed to relate most specially to Lina's own affairs.

One day Sir George called his daughter in to help him to look for a bill he had mislaid. Lina, girl-like, went seeking about in all sorts of impossible places, behind the boomerang, in the sheath of the cutlass, inside her father's umbrella, and then peeping behind the cabinet she happened to see a thick packet wedged in against the wall. She pulled it out with her slender little hand, and saw that it was a parchment covered with many inky flourishes and signatures and wafers (all unavailing enough to fasten the farm they related to to its rightful possessor). Lina peeped inside a fold of the parchment and saw the names of Lefevre and Gorges written over and over again, and she crossed the room slowly, reading as she came along.

'Papa, this must be of consequence,' she said, and the Baronet held out his hand, thinking she had found the bill. '"Agreement between Sir Harold Gorges, baronet, and John Lefevre, farmer, of the same parish, concerning the sale of the fields commonly called Marshfields,"' read Lina, unsuspiciously. Sir George, springing from his seat, snatched the roll angrily out of her hand.

'What have you got there?' he said roughly. 'Have I not told you over and over again that you are

NOT to touch anything in my room?' and without even looking at it, he hastily flung the parchment into the box that stood open before him.

'Do you know what it is, papa?' Lina asked with frightened persistency.

'No, I tell you,' he shouted, and showering down all the other papers that were lying on the table, he closed the iron lid with a great clang, locked it violently, and put the key in his pocket.

So Lina's skeleton was only a parchment skeleton after all. A very vague, backboneless skeleton, and yet it haunted her continually. She had heard the story of the Lefevres' accusation. The thought of that dusty parchment returned to her many and many a time. At church when she saw Mrs. Lefevre's widow's bonnet bobbing before her, the skeleton popped from over a pew. In the sunset lane, when she read poor Hans' verses, her skeleton had risen up, crackling and dusty, to haunt her. Lady Stella had no need to take the young man's defence so warmly. Poor Lina listened, day by day more pale and more distracted. She could not help it. In vain she blamed herself and her own unworthy suspicions. How dare she suspect her father? She was pursued by the thought that she had seen the missing lease. She had tried once again to speak to her father on the subject, but her courage failed before the furious expression of his brows.

Lina was no heroic nature; she could not stand before

his rude vehemence. Miss Gorges should have been cast in some firmer mould. Sir George would have been a better man if his wife and children had been less afraid of him. Lady Stella was the only one of the party from whom he would ever bear a contradiction, but to *her* Lina could not breathe her suspicions; she kept them close and brooded and pondered upon them and drooped sadly.

'She seems all out of tune, somehow,' said Harold to his wife.

'She was very much upset by that scene on the common,' said Lady Stella, 'and now your father is very much vexed because she will not even look at poor Mr. Crockett. It *is* a pity. She wants some more interest in life. She does not seem happy, and does not look well. Harold, look at Baby! actually standing by the chair,' and as she took her baby in her arms, Lady Stella thought to herself, with some sweet and pardonable pride, that she herself was happy, and that her own life was indeed complete.

And yet all this time Lina was growing and toning and ripening in spirits, as people do, who have even a sorrow to educate them. Each terror and regretful longing taught her to feel for others, for the grief at her gate, for the trouble that met her along the road, as no description could have ever taught her, and with her sympathy and secret revolt of heart (which was all the more passionate for its enforced silence and terrified suppression), the

girl's somewhat morbid nature seemed to grow, silence by silence. Some strange new impulse impelled her to be more true to her own self than she had been hitherto. When Lina said no to Mr. Crockett's advantageous proposal, she was firm to her new faith, though she had much to go through from them all, to say nothing of Mr. Crockett's persistent persecution: he was an amiable, obstinate man, and having 'come forward,' as Sir George said, seemed little inclined to go back.

But something had raised a veil from Lina's eyes, taught her to try to grasp at the solemn soul of life, not to fear sorrow as she once had done, nor to turn from those sacred sad rites, by which, at the price of sacrifice and with pangs of self-renunciation, the mystery of life in some inscrutable way, as time goes on, touches the very stones and sanctifies our daily bread.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEAN-STALK UP WHICH JACK TRIED TO CLIMB.

THE next Saturday's *Excelsior* came out with an article which drove Sir George nearly frantic. There was nothing to lay hold of. This polite sarcastic bitterness was very different from the thickly laid-on epithets of vituperative partisanship. In vain the old Baronet stamped and raged and choked over his grilled luncheon bones, there was nothing to be done. He vowed he would bring an action for libel, although his attorney had assured him there was nothing libellous in the article, not even in the opening apologue, where some mythological monster was described, whose voracity not only extended to the donkeys and the geese upon the commons, but to the commons themselves, which he seemed prepared to gulp down—thistles, washing-lines, furze-bushes, and all. This mythological monster was not fastidious—so it was reported. Fair Andromedas, ancient widows, unwary leaseholders, all fell victims to his voracity, to say nothing of farmyards and their unsavoury contents.

The lord of two adjoining manors, the *Excelsior* went on to say, carefully regarded all those rights that could be proved, and only attempted to interfere in cases where the owners were too feeble to resist encroachment, and the rights themselves, although sanctioned by long custom, were more binding in honour than in law.

'What a wicked, wicked shame!' said poor Lady Gorges, looking up from her plate. 'George, dearest, do you really think they mean you?'

'What do I care who they mean?' the Baronet growled, crashing down the paper on the table.

'Perhaps it is Mr. Crockett,' faltered Lady Gorges. 'He has property here, you know, and ——'

'—— —— ——,' said Sir George. 'Give me a sharper knife, Corkson. How dare you bring me such a thing as this!' and he almost flung the great blade into the butler's eye.

'You are quite right to pay no attention to what they say, dear,' faltered Lady Gorges with an agonised look.

'Hold your tongue, Jocasta,' roared her husband. 'Lina, will you have any more cold meat?—say yes or no: —— it! How dare the cook send it up half raw!'

Lina shook her head with an expression of disgust.

When her father left the room, she got up, heedless of

her mother's call, and followed him into the hall, where she heard him stamping about, shouting for his boots, his whip, his horse.

'Your mother is only about one remove from an idiot,' he said to Lina, as she came up; 'how can you let her talk such nonsense? I am going to see Gripham, to talk things over again. —— their impertinence. I know the writer: it is that —— Lefevre—crash him! He shall pay for his articles.'

Lina stood leaning against the hall table, watching her father as he prepared for his ride. . . She felt she must speak. It was her duty, come what might.

'Papa,' she said, in her grave, vibrating voice, 'I must say this—before you take any steps, remember that you never looked at that paper I found. If it were to be the lease, if it were to prove——'

'What, you too!' raved Sir George in a new frenzy. He flung his heavy coat to the ground in his rage, and he seized her by the shoulders. Lina turned pale and sick and giddy, so that she scarcely knew what happened; she did not see his fierce red face turn pale. But she was his girl—the one person in the world he loved. 'Get out of my way,' he said, with a sudden change of tone, letting her go, so suddenly that she would have fallen but for the table. When she looked up her father was gone. The coat was still lying on the ground, and the butler

picked it up. 'Sir George's keys fell out of one of the pockets, ma'am,' said Corkson, 'shall I send them after him?'

'No, give them to me,' said Lina, faintly. 'I will keep them.'

CHAPTER X.

THE ARID COUNTRY TOWARDS WHICH JACK IS CLIMBING.

Up at Stoneymoor Court the sun blazes steadily on the flagged courtyard; it throws the shadow of the brick arcades along the flags; the chimney-stacks stand out against a blue vault where some birds are flying in a line. It is all very silent, very hot. The morning-room windows are open wide. The oak panels look dark and seem a refuge from the flames of this autumn day. It is Lina's own sitting-room, with the grand old chimney, where the scutcheon of the Gorges is carved about the shelf. There are the pictures of the vanished ladies who have inhabited the room in succession: the Sir Antonio More grandmother, whose eyes are Lina's still; the Sir Joshua grandmother, the first Lady Gorges. Those ladies were happy enough no doubt in their morning-room, respected and peaceful, enclosed and protected by the oaken walls from the dangers by night, from the heat of the day, from the wild pains that were still lurking round about the park gate—pains of hunger, of want, of life-long weariness. . .

Those dead ladies had been good women living, sheltered among the branches of the family tree, coming to an edifying end. They did not resent their patches and *eases*, their laces, the pearl necklaces on their slim throats. Why could not their descendant be as they were, useful, contented in her generation, as ready as they had been to keep up the family tradition of womanly beauty and graceful virtue? How could she demean herself as she did by taking an interest where none should have existed for her?

People cannot reveal their secrets and then go back and be as if they had never spoken nor thrilled in sympathy. As the time comes round, people strike their note, speak their word, and are one by one, revealed to each other; and the day had come when Lina revealed herself as she was, and broke through her reserve. When she met Hans again after that miserable discovery, he knew what manner of woman she was. How could she still treat him with lofty young lady indifference and distance? The injustice which had been done to him, her father's violent attack upon him and threatened prosecution—all seemed to draw her towards him; and she found herself talking almost as if he were a baronet's son, asking him one question after another—about himself, about his dispute with her father, about the poor in the parish. One day Hans, who had been telling her many things about her neighbours, eagerly offered to take

her to see old Conderell and the cottage in which he lived, and Lina would have gone off then and there if Lady Stella had not interfered. Lina was very angry with her for interfering, and drew herself up quivering with vexation; but while the discussion was pending, Lady Gorges drove up in her big carriage, and Lina was carried off a prisoner in a dark padded prison, with an immense battlemented coat of arms on the panel.

Lina of the golden hair is standing in one corner of the room in the curious nervous attitude peculiar to her; one foot put straight out, her long arm hanging by her side, and her blue eyes wandering round, anxious and vacant . . . Was anything amiss? Everything looked comfortable and luxurious enough. The gardener had brought two great basins of roses for her table. She had just come in, and had flung her blue gauze scarf and her hat upon a chair, with a volume of La Harpe's *Course of French Literature*, which she had been reading in the garden (there was a verbena leaf to mark her place); some music which had just arrived from Hillford was piled on the floor, Ap Thomas's 'Variations,' 'Erin-go-Bragh,' and other melodies. On the top of the music a great grey fan was lying half open (the women at work in the fields had no fans), and beside the music on the floor at her feet stood a small tin box. It was marked No. 5, and looked just like one of those in Sir George's study.

A sound at the door. Lina hastily covers the box with her scarf and turns round with a startled 'Who is there?'

It is only her mother, who opens the door and puts in her head. 'Your papa is out. I am going to distribute the bread tickets in the housekeeper's room, Lina. Shall we drive at three?'

Lina looks round, absent and a little confused. 'Yes, mamma, at three,' she says.

'That is, if dear papa does *not* come back,' continues Lady Gorges, 'for he *might* be vexed with us for ordering the carriage and *not* wish us to drive.'

'Perhaps not, mamma,' says Lina, with an impatient sigh.

And then Lady Gorges closed the door, and trotted off to the housekeeper's room, where the good lady's chief interests were sorted away, and where twice a week in her husband's absence she assembled a certain number of pensioners. (Her benefactions were not likely to pauperise the neighbourhood, but she kept them from Sir George's knowledge, and economised this bread and meat cast upon the waters, out of the housekeeping books.)

The poor lady would retire to her store-room in the intervals of her husband's temper to solace herself with sugar-loaves and orderly jam-pots, tin cans of spice, and gingerbread nuts. It was Mrs. Plaskett's niece whose duty it was to dust and arrange the contents of the many

cupboards. The store-room led by a narrow stone passage to the door of Sir George's study; it also opened into the yard, and the Baronet had a fancy for passing out this way without being seen by the household. There was a third door leading to the pantry and the kitchens, through which Susan Plaskett would escape if she heard him coming, and where, on bread-and-meat-ticket days, she used to stand sentry, admitting the applicants one by one.

The concourse had been larger than usual. Juvenile Ferriers, Pencuits, Conderells had appeared, each with a dismal story. Mrs. Barnes herself had looked up to ask for help; two of her hens had been killed on the common the day of the 'turn-out,' so Mrs. Barnes called it. They had been found crushed under the branches of a fallen elm.

'One be my best sitter, milady,' quavered the poor old woman. ''Tis a heavy loss to me.'

Lady Gorges gave her a shilling and a certain amount of sympathy and scolding towards making up her loss.

'You really *cannot* expect me to do more, Mrs. Barnes,' said she, 'considering the *very* uncivil, ungrateful way in which you have all been behaving to Sir George, who *always* does *so* much for you all. I was *quite* grieved to hear how you had all forgotten yourselves. Pray remember *not* to forget yourselves again.'

Widow Barnes meekly tottered off with her shilling, feeling that she had been guilty of some vague enormity against her betters. She knew very well that this shilling

would not buy her another Dorking. 'But milady was a real lady, whatever people said. An onquiet lot they were down the village. There was that young Lefevre! 'Twas he set the others on . . . Why couldn't he stop quiet at home instead of flourishing about as he did?' wondered widow Barnes, feebly crawling along the road.

Meanwhile Lina with trembling hands is unlocking No. 5, turning over deeds and plans and hurriedly looking them over, and suddenly with a low exclamation she comes upon the lease she is looking for, the deed concerning the sale of Marshfields, while Lady Gorges is examining an important new case of Albert biscuits, all pasted up with red inscriptions.

'These will do nicely for Sir George's afternoon tea, Susan,' she says to her little attendant. 'I will put some out for to-morrow.'

And Hans the unquiet spirit was jumping over a ditch. Then, by the help of a branch, he lugged himself up a steep embankment, then he leapt over a hedge, and so by the short cut he scrambled up the steep slope to the Hall. He wanted to see Sir George, and to come to terms with him. Hans Lefevre was nobody, but Hans, the accredited agent of the Reds and Greens, with the *Excelsior* to back his demands and a lawyer's opinion in his pocket, to say nothing of all the chances of the coming election, was a personage not to be utterly ignored.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK COMES TO THE OGRE'S MANSION.

And so by one of those chances which sound improbable when they are written down, although they happen often enough in real life, while Hans was wandering round the house in search of an entrance, Lina with trembling hands and drawn blinds was reading over the lines of his future fortune.

Hans found himself in a back yard at last, and walking across, he accosted an elderly woman in a big apron, who stood looking out of a back door; he took her for the housekeeper. She seemed much perturbed when he asked if Sir George was at home.

'Sir George! he is riding up the road! What *do* you want? This is not the right door. My husband does *so* dislike meeting people on his way. You must wait if you want to see him. Here, Plaskett, take this person into the pantry, put by the bread-tickets, and shut the door.'

Hans flushed up, but after a moment's hesitation he followed the maid into the adjoining pantry, when she

began stowing away the bread pans and baskets in the various cupboards. 'You should have gone to the front door, Mr. Lefevre,' said Susan; 'Sir George does storm at us if he meets anyone on his way. There he comes;' and through the closed door Hans could hear a loud voice shouting and scolding.

'Faw! how close your room is! I'm tired. —— it, can't you tell them to bring me some tea? and don't forget the cognac,' he shouted, 'and tell the cook I have another man's dinner to-morrow, and—let her see that the roast is properly served up. The dinner was not half cooked last time. You didn't expect me so soon. I caught Gripham at the station. Where is Lina? I want her.'

Lina heard her father's voice echoing through the open doors, but she did not move.

She had lost her count of time and was still standing with the fatal paper in her hand; she was not reading it, but wondering in a stupid, tired way what she could do: how she had best persuade her father that this was indeed the missing lease to be given up to the rightful owner. Did he know? Ah, no, that at least was impossible. She shrunk from certainty, poor child—and clung passionately to her one hope that he was unconscious of the truth. He had scarcely glanced at the paper as he flung it into the box. How *could* he know? And then suddenly the door opened wide and her mother

CHAPTER XI.

HANS COMES TO THE OGRE'S MANSION.

Such is one of those chances which sound impossible when they are written down, although they happen often enough in real life, while Hans was wandering round the house in search of an entrance, Lina with trembling hands and drawn blinds was reading over the lines of his future fortune.

Hans found himself in a back yard at last, and walking across, he accosted an elderly woman in a big apron who stood looking out of a back door; he took her for the housekeeper. She seemed much perturbed when he asked if Sir George was at home.

'Sir George! he is riding up the road! What do you want? This is not the right door. My husband does so dislike meeting people on his way. You must wait if you want to see him. Here, Plaskett, take this person into the pantry, put by the bread-tickets, and shut the door.'

Hans flushed up, but after a moment's hesitation he followed the maid into the adjoining pantry, where

came in in some hurry and fluster, and Lina, startled, in terror and confusion unconsciously followed her father's precedent and dropped her roll into the open box at her feet.

'My goodness, Lina, what are you about?' cried Lady Gorges; 'your papa is calling for you everywhere.' ('Lina!' came a shout from the distance.) 'He is come back, he wants his cheque-book, and Corkson says you have got the keys. Oh! and you are to take No. 5 deed-box. Are you ill, child? Why have you pulled down the blinds?'

'The sun was too dazzling,' said Lina, trying to collect her thoughts. 'Mamma, what—why does papa want the deed-box?'

'That tiresome young Lefevre is here, come to talk about his rights,' said Lady Gorges. 'I sent him to wait in the pantry. I hope I did not offend him.'

'Oh! mamma, how could you?' said Lina. 'Did he mind?'

'What *does* it signify whether he did or not?' said Lady Gorges. 'It was very disagreeable for *me*: you can hear *every* word that is said from the pantry, and dear papa seemed tired and annoyed. He has *such* an active mind. He has been telling me he thinks of building a new public-house on the common; it is a nice airy situation and an excellent investment, and it was very foolish of me to object.'

'Oh! mamma,' Lina was beginning; but a loud call from her father made her start up hurriedly.

'You will find him in the hall,' said Lady Gorges, as Lina took up the box and ran out of the room.

Lady Gorges went about tidying the room and pulling up the blinds. 'How could she sit in this darkness, and what was she doing with the box?' wondered the mother. 'Dear me, how limp those curtains are! I must speak to Susan.'

If Hans ever felt sorry for anyone in his life, it was for Lina that day, as she came into the hall, carrying the deed-box and the cheque-book that her father had asked for. Sir George was leaning back on one of the big chairs and looking very strangely. The cup of tea Lady Gorges had ordered was there on the table before him, and beside the tea stood a liqueur case and a glass half emptied; and as Lina came in Sir George suddenly filled his cup to the brim with brandy and drained it off. The day was very hot; the Baronet's brain had been greatly excited. He had perhaps wished to brace himself up for the interview with young Lefevre by an extra potation. Alas! Noah Ferrier himself could not have been more completely fuddled and overcome in the bar of the 'Green Ladders' than was the poor Baronet in his own ancestral hall. The Baronet gave a strange sort of chuckling laugh, which frightened poor Lina. Hans came forward, and would have taken the heavy box from

her, but she refused his help, and laid it down herself on the table before her father; and as she did so she saw to her terror that she had left the keys in the lock. But Sir George noticed nothing; and indeed his strange look and voice made Lina forget all else in her bewilderment. Poor Lady Gorges might have been less frightened.

'Come here,' he said; 'is this right-box-number-five-quiteright?'

He ran his words oddly one into the other; but at the same time, with the greatest politeness and elaboration, he began to explain to Hans that he kept all his important papers in different boxes, always different.

'Don't put your eggs' (Sir George called them eggsh) 'into the same basket,' said he. 'This is my deed-box'—he went on, chuckling and patting it with one hand—'my hen with the golden eggs, hey, Lina? . . . That bit of gorse shall pay for your wedding-dress, my dear;' and again he chuckled, and then suddenly nodded off to sleep.

It was one of the most cruel scenes in Lina's life. She looked up at Hans with a wild, imploring look. How sorry he seemed for her!—there was comfort in his compassionate face.

'Your father has been overcome by the heat,' said the young man in a low voice. 'It will pass off; you

need not be frightened. I will come again another day.'

Sir George, who had nodded off, suddenly woke up with a start, and heard the last words.

'Another day!' said he. . . . 'No time like the preshent. Come here, you——. It is my wish,' he added, with great solemnity; and with an effort he sat bolt upright and opened the box with the keys that Lina had left in the key-hole. Then Sir George drew out a map of his estate, which he laid solemnly on the table before him and pushed towards Lefevre.

'There,' said he, 'there is the map, and you will see the common belongsh to the marsh-lands, and the marsh-lands belong to me.'

Hans coloured up. 'There may be some doubt about that, sir,' he said; 'and I do not believe that the owner of the marsh-lands has any right to inclose the common.'

Sir George got very vehement. 'I am the owner of marsh-lands!' he said. 'Who says I'm not? Don't you believe me?——it! Why, here is the lease;' and the wretched old man pulled out the fatal document which was lying at the top of the box, and flung it down on the table. As he did so he looked triumphantly from one to the other. Then some doubt seemed to occur to him, and he would have pulled it back again.

'This is mine; give it back to me,' he shouted; but Hans had taken up the paper, and looked first at Miss Gorges and then at the sleeping man. 'This is mine, not your father's,' he said in a low voice, as he turned it over.

'Then take it and go,' cried Miss Gorges, passionately. 'What are you waiting for? Go, I tell you,' she cried in a sort of agony of shame, clasping her hands. 'Don't you see he has given it you? What are you waiting for?'

What indeed? He could not speak for a minute, so many things were in his mind. For Lina's sake he determined to shield the tipsy old man, and to say that the lease had been willingly delivered up, although Hans was too shrewd not to suspect the real truth of the matter. Did Lina suspect? He hoped not. Poor young lady, how sweet, how pathetic was her story! what a sad life! how beautiful she looked, as she flung down the roll before him, pale and tremulously vibrating, all her soft drift of hair pushed back He should never forget her innocent sad look; the little bit of old yellow lace at her throat, and the gleam of her diamond locket, and the wild soft flash of her eyes. It was a sudden burst of sad music to him in the silence of his life; some instants suddenly reveal all that has gone before, seem to tell of all that is to come, to realise a meaning into existence itself, into all dull and inanimate things, into all monotonous thoughts.

Sir George seemed awakening again.

'He *meant* you to have it,' she repeated; 'I know he did. I entreat of you not to wait.'

Her voice was like a sobbing echo from some long distance off. As Hans left the room, Lina looked after him for one moment. Had the golden horizon of wonder-world gleamed for them both?

CHAPTER XII.

JACK CARRIES OFF THE HEN WITH THE GOLDEN EGGS.

HANS found the cottage deserted. He ran up-stairs and down-stairs in search of his mother who had gone down to the village. He was preparing to go thither in search of her, when Tom Parker rode up to the door in hot haste, stopping his horse with a heave and extending his legs widely apart.

'Take care, Tom! what are you pulling at that bridle for?' said Hans, coming out with a radiant face. 'I say, it is all right about the common, old Gorges is prepared to give in.'

Tom gave a scornful laugh. 'Give in!—not he. Are you going to be taken in by such chaff as that? I was coming for you, Hans. Butcher wants to see you at once. Haven't you heard what is up now? Do you know that the ogre has got out a warrant against Bridges—charge of brawling, obstructing the public way? You must come along and see to it, Hans, my boy,' cried the vulgar Tom on his high-shouldered red mare. 'We must have a slasher next Saturday. And wait till the next election,

when the young ogre comes forward again. But come along—there is no time to lose.'

'You don't mean to say that he has actually dared to summon Mr. Bridges?' cried Hans, very much excited; and he walked off excitedly at the head of Tom Parker's straggly-legged bay.

And so it happened that his mother came home, depressed and tired, to find an empty house, no hint of good in store, no news of Hans. She sat down wearily in a vague and remorseful state of mind. Poor thing! in these twilight hours a melancholy array of ghosts used often to rise up to haunt her: all the things she had done amiss, all those she had left undone; and the words she had said and those she had left unsaid, and the many absurd and indescribable terrors of a troubled mind. Hans had not come in; was he hurt with her? Had she said anything to pain him? He had not answered her the night before when she had complained of Mrs. Plaskett; perhaps he had thought her cold when she said good-by. If only she could understand him better and suffice to him; but somehow, dearly as they loved each other, they seemed a long, long way off: the more she loved him, the more confidence she longed for and the further he seemed away. And incomplete natures wanting more than their desert, are apt to be sad ones; perhaps they would be happier if they could be contented to be content. But as I have said, Emelyn Lefevre was her own life, and with some people everything means everything, and they

put their whole hearts' interest into each mousetrap along the road—and perhaps they catch the mouse and they are scarcely satisfied; or it runs away and they cannot be comforted.

Mrs. Lefevre started up at last, lit a light, and began to sew a little: but her head ached, and she threw down her work and blew out the candle.

She had been sitting for some time in the dark, when some one knocked at the door. 'Is that you, dearest Hans?' she said, with a sigh; there was no answer. The door opened a little farther, and some one came in. The room was so dark, that although the white figure was standing in the doorway, Emelyn did not recognise it. All the dazzling purple twilight was dancing outside, and a faint fresh incense from the evening fields came in with the slim white drift of drapery. 'Who is it? what is it?' said Mrs. Lefevre, starting up.

A low voice answered out of the twilight. 'I am Lina Gorges. Miss Gorges from Stoneymoor. I want to speak to Mrs. Lefevre, or—or her son;' the voice failed, then rallied, with that curious trembling chord that belonged to it.

'Miss Gorges!' said Mrs. Lefevre, surprised, and coming forward. 'Please wait one minute. I will get you a light.'

'No, no; don't get a light,' said Lina: 'I have only

come for one minute. They are waiting for me at the Rectory. I have something to say.'

Mrs. Lefevre was greatly surprised. At another time she might have received Miss Gorges more coldly, but in the darkness of the twilight and the suddenness of the meeting she was surprised into her natural kindly tone, and being an unconventional woman herself, she could understand other people doing things out of the common, and even forgive them for it. So she walked up to her visitor and took her by the hand, saying, 'As you like, my dear; here is a seat in the window, and if you care to speak to me, I am ready to hear you.' And Lina knew, when she heard her speak, how it was that Hans had learnt the ways of a man of her own class of life, and, as she recognised some of the tones, she felt an unconscious sympathy for his mother. Only she sat silent, and realising how dreadful it was to speak. Was there some strange difference between Hans and all the rest of the world, that it seemed to her as if he was the only person who would believe and understand her story?

After Hans left, the time had seemed unending until her father awoke, and then the storm was so terrible that poor Lady Gorges had secretly sent Lina to her brother's house to entreat him to come up. The Baronet was raving that he had been robbed, he had been cheated, and poor Lina's fiction that he had returned the paper deliberately was exposed to every servant in the house. She saw

Corkson open-eared, open-eyed; Plaskett tripping consciously about. She knew that every word was caught up and commented on; the shame seemed almost more than she could bear. If only Hans could know the truth—could know that the lease had been actually lost, that she had only discovered it by accident, that her father was blameless. . . She longed to tell him, he would believe her and help her to believe her own story. She sobbed it out to Lady Stella, who was very kind and sympathising, and who brought her baby to cheer her, and a Dresden cup full of tea. 'I wouldn't go to speak to Mr. Lefevre till you have seen Harold again,' Lady Stella said, brightly; but all the time Lina felt that Hans was the only one person to whom she wanted to turn for help. Stella could not know what she was suffering; when the baby upset the Dresden teacup, she could smile and playfully shake her finger at the little thing, just as if Lina's heart was not beating with shame. Stella did not love her poor papa as she did. 'Oh, my poor papa,' Lina would repeat to herself, again and again. She felt faint; she could not bear the atmosphere of the room, and ran out into the garden, through the window, and breathed more freely. All the lights were low beyond the nut woods, and she saw the purple dimness of the peaceful night spreading over each gorsy hollow; then a star's light silvered into the glow, then a candle shone from the farmhouse window, and it seemed to call her somehow across the dusky fields, and then Lina,

with a sudden determination, had opened the wicket-gate and passed out, crossing the common, and disappearing herself into the twilight gloom. And so it happened that she was sitting in the dark cottage room.

Mrs. Lefevre was waiting, but all words seemed to fail them both. The room was quite dark; a faint streak of moonlight was now coming in through the lattice.

'I thought I could have spoken,' said the girl at last. 'I *can't*—the words won't come—I am very sorry. I will go back to the Rectory.'

Mrs. Lefevre's hand began to tremble a little.

'My dear,' she said, nervously keeping the girl back, 'is anything wrong? Does it concern my son? You must tell me, indeed you must; it would be too cruel to leave me in suspense. Has he got into trouble—has he?' Mrs. Lefevre spoke shrilly.

'No,' said Lina gravely, almost scornfully. 'What should make you doubt *him*? We are in trouble,' said the girl. '*You* need not be unhappy, Mrs. Lefevre. It is we who have done you a wrong. I have discovered it all by chance.'

If Emelyn could have seen her face, she would have understood it all still better than poor Lina, but she was utterly bewildered.

'I have not seen Hans since the morning,' she said. 'I know nothing.' Then with a sudden flash—'Miss Gorges! A wrong? Is it possible that the lease——'

—Emelyn Lefevre had curious and rapid inspirations at times—'Did *you* find it?' she cried. 'God bless you. Oh! my boy—my boy.'

'Yes; I found it,' said Lina, in a low, shame-stricken voice; 'it had been hidden away for years. No one knew of its existence. You will believe me, won't you? You will tell him to believe me?' she said.

'Yes, my dear,' said Mrs. Lefevre. 'Yes, my dear, he will believe you. Do not be afraid,' and once more the widow took Lina's passive, cold hand and with some sudden impulse bent forward and kissed her.

Then Lina got up to go away; and as she crossed the garden she saw Hans coming in at the gate.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACK HEARS THE STRAIN OF THE HARP MUSIC.

A GREAT red crescent moon came floating from behind the fresh dark trees. It hung burning gently in the sky, lighting the little garden full of cottage flowers, and the white heads of the hollyhocks by which Lina was standing. This was a home-coming that Hans had never dreamt of as he hurried along the dark lanes. Hans almost expected that she would vanish from his eyes, or turn into a flower, a moonbeam, a stray light upon a drift of vapour, if he spoke; but as he waited he heard Miss Gorges say his name in a low tone that struck familiarly on his ear, it was the vision that vanished away, Lina remained.

'I have seen your mother. I have told her,' said Lina, with some agitation, hurrying to her point as people do when they are nervous, 'something that I wanted you to know. You will remember, won't you, that *I* myself found the lease?' she repeated, wistfully. 'Shall I tell you the truth? Papa did not know of it; that is the truth. Now he knows what the paper was that he gave

you; but I shall trust to you,' she said, 'whatever the future may bring.'

'Indeed you may,' said Lefevre, very much moved; 'and if you only trust me, I don't care who else——' He stopped short with a look that lighted up even this dim radiance of garden and sweet mystery. Lina's eyes filled with tears that seemed to come from some long, long distance. Her whole unreasonable tender heart seemed to go out in gratitude towards the friend who had found her in her trouble, who had understood her unspoken prayer. 'You will never tell anyone?' she repeated wistfully.

'I saw the lawyer to-day,' Lefevre answered gravely. 'I have told him your father has returned the papers which had been so long mislaid. You and I need never speak of this again to each other, nor to anyone else. I hope you will not be unhappy any more; indeed there is nothing to be afraid of;' and then he was also silent. More stars came out, and wide breaths came from beyond the fields, and evening whispers and mysterious hushes, and in the dreamy light their eyes met once and then fell again. Mrs. Lefevre had gone back into the cottage, where the lamp was now alight and shining through a green curtain of garlanded clematis; and here, outside, everything was turning to a silvery radiance—the very words and silence, the sleeping plants, the vapours and light clouds; even sorrow seemed beautiful to Lina at that moment, as she

said in a low, sudden voice, 'Tell me how it is that I came. I do not know. I don't know,' she continued, 'how it is. I wanted you to know it all. . . . My poor papa, my poor papa!' sighed the girl with a great irrepressible sigh.

'You came in your kindness,' said Hans, gravely; 'but I can only say, don't let us speak of all this again, and remember that I shall never let anyone else speak to me on the subject.' As his dark eyes lighted upon Lina they seemed (in her moved fancy) to put a meaning into all the past dead and sorrowful and bitter things among which she had grown up so sadly—to make a link between herself and the whole human race. 'Don't you know that I love you?' Hans seemed to say by his silence as he looked at her. Lina's whole heart was moved and sweet in the moonlight. . . . The church clock struck at last, ringing through the shadows. 'I must go,' said Lina, remembering herself; and then, still without a word, Hans turned round and walked by her side, crossing the road and coming into the great stubble-field where they could see the country in moonlit miles, and all the stars of heaven assembling.

Not far from the Rectory gate some one met them with an exclamation of surprise. It was Lady Stella, with a lace shawl over her head.

'Lina! I have been looking for you. You missed me.' 'I had meant to come with Miss Gorges,' said Lady Stella,

turning to Hans, with, for the first time, some slight indescribable touch of patrician precision and distance in her voice. 'I also wished to tell you that we are very glad indeed to hear that you are to have your land after all. My husband has gone up to the Hall, and will speak to his father and say everything, you may be sure, that you would wish said in your interest. Pray don't let us take you any farther out of your way. Come, Lina.'

They were gone, without a good-night. Lina, frightened and overwhelmed by her sister's tone, had turned without a word or a look and followed her along the field-path. Hans saw them flitting like ghosts into the shadow of the great walnut tree.

Lady Stella did not know—how could she?—all that had happened that day. This visit had seemed to her a strange and uncalled-for proceeding of Lina's. She had rigid ideas of etiquette, for all her sweet charity of heart. She did not say much, but her displeasure was apparent. 'Good-night, dearest,' she said, a little reproachfully, as Lina was going home. 'I think you must wait for me another time. You know I am your chaperone, and it is not usual for young ladies to go about alone. I shall come up and see you early to-morrow.'

'Good-night,' said Lina passively, as she sank back in a corner of the carriage, and with a crunching jolt the

great landau drove off with the pale girl safely shut in. As she passed the low farmhouse she saw the light still in the lattice window. How ungrateful she had been! She had left him without a word or a farewell sign. Would he ever know her heart's gratitude? 'Never, never,' said Lina to herself, bursting into tears in the choking padded darkness.

Never! so people say to themselves, forgetting how short their nevers are. Never! we say; an image of all eternity makes us reel as it dazzles before us; but never is not eternity, only a poor little life wearing away day by day, hour by hour. Seventy or eighty years and our never is over for us.

Hans had certainly been hurt by Lady Stella's coldness and distance, and by Lina's silent acceptation of her blame; he had never presumed—it was she who had sought him out; he had deserved better treatment. They were not to be trusted, these fine ladies.

Some people are born free, some are born slaves by nature—Lina was a slave by nature. A superior slave, but for all that she was not free. Hans was a freeman born—no willing dependent upon a fine lady's caprices. When Lady Stella spoke in that galling tone of unconscious superiority, Lina should have shown, as she might have done, that the interest she took was something more than that of a casual patroness showing some passing interest in a poor young dependent. Hans was all the more angry

because he seemed to feel this failure as a flaw in a sweet and noble character. Sweet indeed, and unlike anything and anyone in his limited experience. Lady Stella had been kindness itself, but with Lina there had been this understanding sympathy—he scarce knew what name to give the feeling—and for her to turn away in that grand-lady manner had pained him and wounded him beyond expression.

His mother blessed him as she said 'Good-night.' 'There is no one like my Hans,' she said proudly; and looking at him with wistful eyes, 'Hans, I am not the only person who thinks so, my dear.'

Hans turned away abruptly. He went up to his room, and for hours the widow heard him pacing overhead until she fell asleep. 'Hush!' said the night. Hans leant his head upon his hands, and stretched out from the open lattice; under the faint light that seemed raining from heaven, lay the woods, the dusky roofs, and all dim outlines, confused, indistinct. As he pressed his hands against his head, he tried with an effort to calm the rush of the torrent of life, that seemed only the more vivid for the silent mystery all round.

Lady Stella said nothing of Lina's visit to the farm, and Lina herself offered no explanation. Lady Stella was a discreet woman. She had that gift of considerate silence which belongs to people of a certain world, who

have almost inherited the tradition. Discretion is not reserve: Lina was reserved, but not discreet. She could only open her heart in sudden impulses and pour it forth in a passionate cadence. She could not sing Lady Stella's sweet and gentle song. But then all Lady Stella's life was gentle: she had no lonely hours, no dark suspicions to poison her trust, no bitter reserves with those she loved.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEAN-STALK.

Poor Lina! After that moonlight, sunshine came to make all things cruelly distinct; to scare away the sweetest dreams; to light up dull facts, monotonous habits, disappointment, people at play, people at work, common sense on the face of things—the Gorges' crest on the panel of the great carriage as it rolled up the lane. How sensible it seemed, with all that it entailed—that hideous dragon's head to which Lina was expected to sacrifice her poor little life without a moment's doubt or hesitation! Lina could ill stand doubt. She was constant, but not faithful by nature; she could ill hold her own against the tacit will of those she loved; she made no effort to see Hans again, but her confidence seemed to droop with her spirits; and though she scarcely owned it to herself, she longed to hear of him again. Once, with a secret trepidation, she had announced her intention of walking down to the farm; why should she not go? she asked herself.

'My dear,' said Lady Gorges, taking her aside, 'you must not think of it; your papa would be *so* displeased.'

This must be at Stella's suggestion, thought the girl. For a time she was very angry with Stella; but how was it possible to keep up a coldness with anyone so sweet?—only the girl's confidence seemed to droop away little by little.

And indeed Sir George could not hear Hans' name mentioned without fierce volleys of abuse. Day by day his temper became fiercer, his humours more unbearable. Lina said nothing; her only language was to grow more silent; she seemed to fade and fade in her corner. If only she could have heard them mention Hans' name sometimes, she would have minded it less; but neither Harold nor Stella ever spoke of him now; and one day when Lina was driving with her brother Harold, and met him in the lane and would have stopped, Harold urged on the pony, taking the reins from her hands.

'Harold, why wouldn't you stop?' said Lina, almost in a passion.

'I am in a hurry, dear,' said Harold weakly, confused. 'I have a christening at three o'clock—and there are reasons;' but she could not make up her mind to question her brother. Lina used to ask herself what she had done —where her crime had been?

This was the truth, although Harold did not like to tell his sister of it: there had been odd rumours in the

village. Lady Stella might be discreet, but Mrs. Lefevre could not help speaking to Mrs. Plaskett of Lina's visit; Mrs. Plaskett had repeated the story with many fanciful additions, and some version of it had come to the Rector. He and his wife were in terror lest it should reach the Hall. Lina must not hear of it, they decided, and all intercourse with the farm must cease. And to spare one pang, as people do, they inflicted another still worse. People talked, as people talk, without much meaning.

I will not enter into the details of the business which ended in Hans being reinstated in his father's domain. There was no need for pinching now. Hodgetts' wages might be raised; Mrs. Lefevre might take her ease with two neatly-drilled maids to obey her orders. The old farm was painted, trellised, the garden was re-stocked, re-gravelled, re-lawned, a pony was talked about. Harold called to see Hans one day, and to offer compensation for the land upon which his own house was standing. This land rent came out of the young man's private resources, and was somewhat of a tax, but he did not grudge it. Mr. Gorges found the young farmer sitting reading some papers under the verandah, and full of a scheme for a joint-stock farming company; his own labourers were to have shares in it, and he had engaged a manager for a time, while he himself went off to the Agricultural College to study the business more thoroughly.

'You will be giving up your *Excelsior*,' said Harold Gorges, not without some secret relief.

'I am only going for a few months,' said Hans. 'I hope to keep my hand in at the office, and to be home again before the elections.'

Harold looked rather uncomfortable. His brother Jasper was coming forward for election before long; he was very doubtful as to what his reception might be; and a vision of future *Excelsiors* and savage leading articles came before him.

While Lina was unhappy, and brooding, Hans was working and interested, and angry perhaps, but anger is far less wearisome than passive regret and silent suppression. The farm had thrown out fresh gables; the garden was trimmed and blooming. Hans' carts were rolling along the lane; Mrs. Lefevre, in a nice black dress, would sit sewing in the porch. One day as Lina drove past she saw that Hans was standing beside his mother, and he took off his hat as his mother kissed her hand audaciously to Lina, and the girl bent her head in answer. Jasper Gorges, who had come home, and who was riding alongside of the carriage, was furious.

'How can you encourage such impertinence?' he said, cantering up. 'That low ploughman!'

Lina coloured up: 'Why do you speak of Mr. Lefevre in that way, Jasper; what wrong has he done you?'

'Remember that I have heard more than you seem to imagine,' said Jasper, savagely. 'He is at the bottom of everything. I believe him to have organised this attack upon my father. Do you know that they have already contrived to get Mr. Kewsy to come down from London to defend that fellow Bridges? If it wasn't for the election I would give them my mind,' said Jasper, in his father's own tones, cutting at his poor little mare.

Jasper was quite right in one of his surmises. It was Hans who had spirited up the Reds and Greens to apply to Mr. Kewsy, and to organise the Bridges Defence Committee. Young as he was, he had that peculiar art of leadership which is so hard to define: that gift of personal influence and persuasion. His sleepy eyes seemed to open wide, his courage to rise; a something that would have been called heroic in past times, seemed to carry other convictions with his own. Mr. Kewsy himself was very much interested by the modest and handsome young fellow, and when that learned counsel appeared in court, strong in heart and clear in his merciless logic, Sir George's summons was dismissed, and Bridges came off with flying colours.

That winter was very severe: the cold nipped people's hearts; aches and pains seemed borne down by the heavy iron clouds; trees shivered and shook their frozen twigs in the blast. Birds were found lying dead under the hedges, and the price of provisions and of coals rose

higher than had been known for years. In the spring, warmth, and light, and ease returned, but the prices were still excessive. Some landlords—the Duke among them —had raised their wages. Jasper Gorges, who was a shrewd man, told his father that he had been looking into the matter, and that before long it would be necessary for him to do so too. 'We must remember the election,' said Jasper.

'What do they want with more wages?' growled Sir George. 'It is that —— *Excelsior* putting us to all this expense. That —— paper is at the bottom of it all.'

The *Excelsior* still held its place, and now and then published articles that were really remarkable in their way—clearly conceived, simply expressed; others were sheer clap-trap, and Hans blushed as he read them. But he worked away with all his might at his own work, and from time to time sent articles from the College, and once or twice he came home to see his mother. Hans believed in his cause and his organ, though now and then chance expressions that Butcher let drop struck him oddly. But he was too single-hearted to suspect others of motives different from his own.

When Hans came back from the self-imposed course that he had undertaken, he was well satisfied with the condition of things in the home farm, but he thought there was a change in Tom Parker and Butcher. They welcomed him gladly, and made him as much at home as

ever; but they seemed to be preoccupied with personalities, private discussions, and vague schemes for putting this man and that man into this place and that place, in all of which the *Excelsior* took part; but with which Hans himself could not sympathise with much cordiality.

CHAPTER XV.

JACK STARTS ON HIS SECOND JOURNEY TO THE OGRE'S CASTLE.

ONE day Hans had a somewhat unpleasant discussion with Butcher in the office, where he had gone to write a leader. He had come in in the middle of a conversation between Butcher and Parker, who was in his shirt-sleeves superintending the men.

'We can't afford to have him popular—never do for us. They say Jasper Gorges has not such a bad chance, after all. He is a clever fellow, and knows which way his bread is buttered.'

'What is it all about?' asked Hans.

'Oh!' said Butcher, 'the old ogre wants to raise his wages. He might get popular, you know—never do for us.

'Look here, Tom,' said Butcher, with a grin. 'I know how to stop it at once. We'll recommend him to do it, in a rattling leader.

'But why shouldn't he raise his wages?' said Hans.

'And why stop it? What is it to us whether Jasper Gorges or Lord Henry gets in for the county? I don't suppose it will make much difference to any one of us in the long run.'

'Look here,' said Butcher, and he pointed to a paragraph in the *Excelsior*.

'We understand that Lord Henry Cropland, the second son of the Duke of Farmington, is about to issue an address to the electors of Hillford and Hayhurst on the occasion of the forthcoming election. His lordship, it will be remembered, has very lately come to reside among us, having retired from the navy, where he has seen much service. He is a staunch Liberal. Mr. Gorges, the eldest son of Sir George Gorges, of Stoneymoor Court, has also announced his intention of coming forward as the Conservative candidate. Mr. Gorges has already tried on more than one occasion, to gain a seat in Parliament. We are also authorised to state that the working men of Hillford have unanimously determined that the time has now come for them to put forward a representative of their own order.'

'Will Bridges come forward?' said Hans, eagerly.

'We are going to try for him,' said Butcher, with a look at Tom Parker.

'And if you can't get Bridges?' said Hans.

'Well, there is you and me and Tom here,' said Butcher slowly. Hans coloured up, and they were all three silent for a minute.

Before he left Hans resumed the wages discussion.

Butcher did not like being opposed, and answered sharply, that this was not the time to move for higher wages: it would do positive harm instead of good. Wait till the harvest time—that was the time to strike.

'I don't at all agree with you,' said Hans, hotly; 'it's a shabby trick;' and if Tom Parker had not interfered, there would have been a quarrel.

As Hans left the office, he almost ran up against Sir George, who was walking in, and who scowled at him as usual. Sir George was followed by Jasper, who bowed politely as he passed; but Hans thought he preferred the father's open scowl.

And meanwhile Mrs. Lefevre basked in her son's presence again. To hear him come and go was perfect felicity after his long absence. For years past she had not been so free from care. Hans was not idle all that week; he went into his own affairs and into his neighbours'; he went from cottage to cottage; he cross-questioned a whole parish of agricultural labourers, and at the end of the time he made up his mind that the rise in wages was an absolute necessity. His own labourers were few in number, but their interest was safe; 'and if Butcher threatens or frightens or talks Sir George out of his good intentions, I'll never write another line for the *Excelsior*,' said Hans to his mother. 'This is the time to ask for an advance. I hate that plan of waiting till the crops are ready to be gathered They tell me there were acres of wheat spoilt last summer

by the strike of the reapers. I can't understand such a man as Bridges countenancing such a beggarly scheme.'

'Where are you going to now, dear?' said his mother, as Hans turned to leave the room.

'I will tell you later,' said Hans, and suddenly stopped short and kissed his mother on the cheek.

Then he came back. 'I am going to the Hall,' he said; 'I had better beard the old fellow in his den. I shall try and get him to sign the landlords' agreement to a rise of wages since he seems in the mood.'

Mrs. Lefevre looked hard at him. 'I am glad you are going, dear,' she said. Something seemed to have opened her heart. She no longer worried and complained of his ways as she used to do. She could not love him more than she had ever loved him; but she spoke her love in other words. Things come right as they go wrong, one can scarce tell how.

CHAPTER XVI.

JACK SECURES THE MONEY BAGS.

MRS. LEFEVRE, going out into the garden some two hours later to look at her beehives, found to her surprise that Hans was come back. He was sitting on the bench by the great walnut tree. His hands were in his pockets, his long legs were stretched out upon the grass, and he was looking straight before him, staring at a great city of growing hollyhocks, of which the spires and minarets were aflame in the slanting light. Hans did not move until his mother came up to him, but as she laid her hand upon his shoulder, he looked up in her face with a very strange expression.

'Well, dear,' she said, 'have you seen Sir George?'

'I have seen him,' Hans answered; 'and I have seen *her*,' he said, in some agitation. 'Mother, how ill she looks! Do you think she will——she will die? I met her in the hall as I was coming away. She called me back — she——. Oh, mother!' said Hans, suddenly throwing his arms round his mother's waist, and hiding his

face for a moment against her, 'I can't believe it, I can't believe it.'

Emelyn's own heart was beating as tumultuously as her son's almost. She understood all that he would have said, as she had guessed at poor Lina's unconscious secret long before. 'Hans, darling, what did she say?' she cried excitedly. 'I knew it all along; I knew that she loved you that day when she came here. Oh, my dear, my dear, how could she help loving you?' said Mrs. Lefevre, melting utterly.

'Hush, dear,' said Hans.

'Did you see Sir George?' Mrs. Lefevre asked. She was trembling, and sat down beside him on the bench.

'Yes; they showed me into the drawing-room, by mistake for the pantry, I suppose,' said Hans. 'They were all drinking tea; Mr. Crockett was there with a pair of sugar-tongs, and Sir George. *She* looked up, poor darling, with her sweet face, but Lady Gorges rushed in between us, and then Sir George took me away.

'And how did he behave?' said Mrs. Lefevre.

'He was wonderfully civil; and to my amazement he agreed at once to sign the landlords' agreement; he said he had heard of it, and that he had been wanting to speak to me on the subject, and actually signed then and there. He talked a great deal of nonsense about the elections, and then——' Hans stopped.

'And then what?' said his mother.

'And then he suddenly said he was very glad to hear that the agricultural interest was likely to be so fairly represented,' Hans continued, blushing; 'and that although Mr. Bridges could not stand, he strongly recommended me to agree to Butcher's suggestion, and to come forward as popular candidate.'

'*You!*' said Mrs. Lefevre, in utter amazement and consternation. '*You*, Hans?'

Hans looked a little conscious. 'I thought he was half tipsy at the time,' said the young man, dryly; 'but look here, mother: I met Tom Parker, who was bringing this up.'

'*This*' was a telegram from Butcher: 'Bridges refuses to come forward. H. L. has the qualification. Tell him to trust to us. *Excelsior* shall bring him in.'

'Parker showed me this, and said they would share the expenses,' said Hans, looking his mother hard in the face, with an odd expression.

'My dearest Hans,' cried Mrs. Lefevre in a rapture of excitement, 'what does this mean? I can hardly take it all in! Should you know how to do it? Could you afford it? Oh! my dear, dear boy, be careful.'

'I'm careful enough,' said Hans, quietly. You needn't excite yourself, mother—it is only an electioneering trick;' and he crumpled the paper up, and put it in his pocket again, and sighed. 'People don't have roast quails dropping into their mouths now-a-days.'

'Why should you call it a trick?' said Mrs. Lefevre, mortified by his calmness. 'What greater honour could be done you at your age? I can hardly believe it. Oh, if your father were but here to see this day!' and Emelyn flushed up, and was becoming somewhat hysterically oratorical.

But Hans stopped her. He put his hand on hers: 'Listen, mother,' he said; 'it's all a bubble. *She* warned me—I told you she came running after me,' he said. 'I heard her dear voice calling me as I came away. I was to take care—she did not understand, but she knew that Mr. Butcher had planned something against me. It was something to bring Jasper in. Jasper was to give the money, she said, and I was to spoil Lord Henry's election. She said she had heard them talking on the terrace. Then she took my hand—and oh, mother, she burst out crying, and said she could bear this cold estrangement no longer—that she did not forget—she could not bear it.'

'And then?' said Mrs. Lefevre.

'And then Jasper himself came into the hall with Lady Stella,' said Hans, with a bitter sort of laugh, 'and he would have liked to turn me out of the house: but I can stand my ground, you know—it was a painful scene enough. At all events the wages are safe,' he said, with another great sigh, 'and Sir George has signed the landlords' agreement.'

Mrs. Lefevre was not thinking of wages; she was looking at her son, with vague, dreamy eyes. 'Hans, you ought to go back,' she said, suddenly. 'You won't leave her all alone to bear the brunt of their anger? Hans, dear, do you love her? She might be a happy woman if you do. Listen, dearest: she might come here, where I have been so happy and so unhappy,' said Emelyn, with her two hands on her tall boy's shoulders, and looking tenderly and wistfully into his face.

He was quite pale.

'Do you mean it?' he said, with tender eyes. 'I too, mother, have been thinking something of the sort. She will die if she stops up there. Her hands are quite thin and transparent. Do I love her?—with all my heart and soul I love her.'

CHAPTER XVII.

JACK STEALS THE GOLDEN HARP.

THEY had dined early at Stoneymoor that evening. Lady Stella had gone home very sad at heart. Jasper, who suspected Lina, had behaved very cruelly; sneered at her, and taunted her mercilessly. He had not heard what Lina said to Hans, but he shrewdly guessed that she had given him some warning, and hence his rage against her. Lina had borne it all impassively, and scarcely seemed to hear; Lady Gorges had sat in her best feathered dinner-cap, with tears slowly flowing down her cheeks; Sir George had sworn, and growled, and d——d, but even he had thought that Jasper went too far in his anger against his sister, and once he took her part: 'Jasper, what are you worrying on about? Eat your dinner, can't you? These marrow-bones are excellent.' This was too much for the poor girl: she had born the unkindness in stolid silence—at her father's first word of kindness she burst into tears, and ran out of the room. After dinner he had called her back to play to him as usual.

Lina was sitting on the step of the terrace. The dining-

room window was open, and Sir George was snoring in his easy-chair. Lady Gorges had retired to her room, and Jasper had been summoned to Hillford to talk matters over with his agent. Lina cared not for his anger at that moment: there she sat in a shadow, leaning her head against one of the stone pilasters. As the gold streamed westward some solemn vapours were massed in purple and splendour beyond the trees and flower-beds. Every leaf, every flower was bathed in light, and from her shadowy corner Lina watched it all; but this hour was not for her. She was thinking over what had happened, shivering with shame at the thought of her own boldness, and crying out in her heart at the injustice of her fate. To Jasper, Lina said nothing, but she had turned furiously upon Lady Stella before she left. 'It is easy for you,' she had said to Stella: 'you may speak and be yourself, and love Harold and not be ashamed. But I! what have I done, what have I said that you and Jasper are so cruel to me? Mamma looks pleased enough if I speak civilly to Mr. Crockett: she would be enchanted if I took the smallest interest in his affairs, or cared one sixpence for his opinion; and here is a man who is cleverer and braver, and a thousand times better than he, and whom I respect with all my heart, and whom we have wronged most cruelly. If I even speak to him, you are all up in arms; and if I feel grateful for his kindness and help—and you don't know what that has been—you cry out and say it is shame

and a degradation. It seems to me that it is we who are degraded,' said Lina, with a burst of tears, 'when we are grasping and ungrateful, when we set vanity and worldliness and good investments above everything else in life.'

Stella hardly knew Lina as she stood quivering and passionate before her: the girl looked transformed, beautiful, vehement, and Lady Stella looked at her hard with her clear thoughtful eyes. A vision rose before her of Mr. Crockett, amiable, weak-eyed, feebly admiring, and of young Hans Lefevre as he had looked when he walked in among them that day, simple and erect, with his honest eagle face and the grand seigneur manner of people who have not lived in the world, but who instinctively hold their own among other men and women, and then Lady Stella took Lina's hand and kissed it. She could not say anything to her, for in her own kind heart of hearts she felt that the girl had a right to cry out against that strange superstition which condemned her. Stella being gone, Lina's burst of indignation over, the reaction having set in, she sat as I have said—shivering at the thought of her own bold speech. Had she saved Hans from any dangerous step? that at least she need not regret; for did she not owe thus much to him and to her friendship? and in all her perplexed regret it was peace to have seen him again—to have spoken her mind, not to a stranger, but to a friend. It was a sort of farewell, thought Lina, to the might-have-been that would never be hers. Good-by, said her heart;

you have sown no grain, you can reap no harvest in life. There is no happiness anywhere, but perhaps there may be some work and a little courage to do it; and then came the old refrain.

'My poor papa, my poor papa,' sighed Lina, looking in through the open window at the sleeping man, 'I have been false to you, and to my friend and to myself, and yet I meant to be true;' and she hid her pale face in her hands. The sunset had spread by this time, and Lina's golden hair was burning in a sort of evening aureole, lighting that shadowy corner. She heard a step fall on the stones, and looking round with her tear-dimmed face she saw Hans standing erect in the full blaze of light, smiling and undismayed.

'Oh, why have you come?' she cried, faltering. And she started up half frightened, and held out both hands, saying, 'Go. Papa is there; he will hear you.'

But Hans did not move, and stood holding her hand. 'Don't you know why I have come back?' he said.

'Where have you been?' she faltered, 'have you agreed to stand against Jasper?'

'I have refused to stand, and parted with my share of the paper,' said Hans. 'I had resolved to leave them even before your warning.'

'And you forgive us?' said Lina, almost crying with agitation; 'why have you come?'

The sight of her tears gave him strange courage. 'I

have come back because I could not keep away,' he said, with a sudden outburst of tender passion.

'Oh, no, no!' said poor Lina, passionately; 'this is the last time; the last time.'

'Listen,' he said, with some decision; 'I must speak now. Can't you love me better than all these things which do not make you happy? I am not afraid that you will ever regret them, if you will trust to me and come—home—with me.'

What a sudden love-making was this, flashing into the last sunset minutes of this dying day—love-making to the sinking of the sun, in its burning lights, its sumptuous glooms and sombre flashes! The distant lights seemed to call to her, his voice and looks seemed to call, and for one instant Hans' arm was round her, and she did not move or speak—only her eyes spoke.

Jack of the Bean-stalk carried his precious golden harp boldly away, notwithstanding its piteous outcries. There is a picture of him wielding his prize in one hand, and warding off the giant with the other. To-night it was no giant awakening—but an old man still asleep in an arm-chair by the window—and, for all his cruelty and harshness, Lina was the only person he loved: how could she forget it? 'Yes, I do love you,' she said; 'but I can't—I can't leave him so. Don't ask it—oh, don't ask it. Papa! papa!' she called, in a shrill, pitiful voice, suddenly clasping Hans in her arms.

Then Sir George, hearing his daughter's voice, woke up, and in his stupid, half-tipsy sleep, he started from his chair, and came staggering out into the garden. And as he came, his foot caught in some mat in the window, and with one more oath he fell, with a heavy thud, upon the ground; his head struck against the window step. He lay senseless. His daughter shrieked, and ran to him. Hans helped her to raise him from the ground.

The frightened servants coming in, found Miss Gorges alone, kneeling on the ground, and trying to staunch the blood that was flowing from the wound in her father's head. Hans had hurried off for a doctor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK BRINGS HOME THE GOLDEN HARP AND CUTS THE BEAN-STALK.

THE Baronet rallied a little, but he was never himself again. The shock brought on paralysis, which had long been impending, and he died within a year. This paralysis may (as doctors will tell us) perhaps have been the secret of his mad furies and ravings. During his illness the story of the negotiation with Butcher came out, and cost Jasper his election. Tom Parker disclosed the transaction. The Duke and his son Lord Henry were indignant beyond words. 'It was a shabby plot; the Gorges tried to get up a Radical diversion, and were to pay half the expenses,' Lord Henry told everyone. 'Bridges suspected the whole affair, and refused to have anything to do with it, and so did young Lefevre, whom they tried to bring forward. He is a very fine fellow,' said Lord Henry, who could afford to be generous; 'I hear he has cut the whole concern since then.'

'But they tell me he is engaged to Miss Gorges,' said the Duchess. 'It seems a strange story altogether.'

When the Baronet died, it was found that he had not signed his will. Lady Gorges took her jointure, Lina only received her great-aunt's inheritance; it was little enough, but it came in conveniently for her housekeeping when the 'strange affair' came off. There was no strangeness for Lina on the day when Hans brought her home. After her father's death she wrote to him to come, and he came and fetched her away. Jasper was livid with concentrated spite and fury, but for the first time in her life Lina felt satisfied and at peace. Not the less that sweet Lady Stella's fears were over, and she had only brightest sympathies to give. Lady Gorges had no opinion on the subject; now that Sir George was dead, she subsided utterly, and agreed with everything and everybody in turns. The two were married in London very quietly, and after a little tour came home to the farm, to which a new wing was eventually added. Mrs. Lefevre lived on in the old wing of the house, and spoilt her grandchildren. Hans rose in the world: his joint farming company flourished, his writings became widely known, and one day his name appeared at the head of the Hillford poll, and the Radical member was returned at last. Then Emelyn felt that in some mysterious way an answer had come to the problems of her own life. She had failed, but she had tried to accomplish some ends, and here was her son who had done many good works, and who seemed in some measure to be the answer to her vague prayers for better

things. She had scarcely known what she wanted, but whatever it was, with all its shortcomings her life had unconsciously harmonised with her son's right-doing; and there are few women who would not feel with Emelyn Lefevre, that in the well-being and uprightness of the children they love there is a blessing and a happiness even beyond the completeness of one single experience.

THE WHITE CAT

ARGUMENT.

THIS was the story we told in the Normandy curé's garden,
Under the pear-tree boughs and the clothes hanging out in the sunshine.
Kings have their foibles, they say, and their sons are not dutiful always.
Long long ago was a king, in the days of the fairies and ogres,
Father of three tall sons, two of whom had a mind to succeed him.
Which should he choose of the three? Primogeniture was not invented;
There were no Class Lists then or Competitive Examinations.
Still the choice must be made. So he sent them away on their travels,
Each with a horse and a groom, and money enough for a journey.
Each was to bring back a dog, such as Fairyland only can furnish—
One that could laugh, play the flute, smoke pipes, make a bow and a curtsey
Leap through a hoop—and the hoop, the ring on the King's little finger.
So on their travels they went where three roads branched on a common.
Which shall we follow? The youngest—fairies favour the youngest.
On he rode all day; then lost his way in the darkness,
Deep in a wood, till he came where a castle with moat and with drawbridge
Stood up black to the sky, with a horn by the porter's gateway.
Loudly he blew: down rattled the drawbridge, up the portcullis.
Into the courtyard he rode: then a hand was laid on his bridle;
Torches flitted about and danced before to the doorway;
Then came a pair of hands, and took off his boots and his helmet,
Wheeled an armchair to the fire; more hands brought a table and supper—
Capons and pasties and sack. After supper a candle came trotting,
Showed him the way to his room and a grand mahogany bedstead.
All was the same next morning; but while he was thinking of starting,
Some one knocked at the door. Then entered the loveliest princess—
Princess? no, but a cat—such a cat might look at a princess—
Furry and soft and white, with a cap and a white fur jacket;
Badè him welcome, and then took him out to hunt in the forest.
Never was cat so kind: so he stayed for a week and a fortnight,
Then for another; and so stayed on till the end of the twelvemonth.
Then at last he remembered his errand—but how to perform it?
'Leave it to me,' said the Cat; 'at the end of the week you shall have it.'
So when Saturday came she gave him a gilded walnut,
Bade him soon come back, and brought him his horse and his helmet.

Homeward he rode to the King. He was half ashamed when he saw the
Sweet little dogs which his brothers had brought as their claim to the kingdom.
All of them laughed in his face when he offered his gilded walnut.
'Crack it, you fool!' said the King; so he did. Instead of a kernel,
Lay coiled up a King Charles no bigger than my little finger.
Out of the shell he jumped, and clean through the old king's signet.
Nobcdy looked much pleased—not the king nor the elder princes:
All had thought him a dunce—and they found that the dunce was the winner.
'Come, come, boys,' said the King, 'you must show me more of your mettle.
'What! give a crown for a dog? half-a-crown is its weight in silver.
'Off with you once again; bring back fine gossamer linen,
'Each, one hundred yards, that can pass through the ring on my finger.
So on their travels they went where three roads branched on a common:
They North, South, East, West; he away to the White Cat's castle.
All went on as before: he stayed and stayed for a twelvemonth.
'Leave it to me,' said the Cat; 'by the end of the week you shall have it.'
So when Saturday came she gave him a gilded filbert,
Bade him soon come back, and brought him his horse and his helmet.
Back he rode to the King. The stupid brothers were laughing,
Laughing, but not very long—their linen counted for nothing;
His was the fairest and finest, the work of the fairy spiders.
Yards upon yards tumbled out, broad breadth, good measure, and all would
Pass through the signet ring. But the King, 'What! give up my kingdom
'Now—to a boy! No no; you must go and fetch me a queen, sir.
'Who brings the fairest bride shall have my kingdom for nothing.
'Off with you all for a bride, and be back by the end of a twelvemonth.'
So on their travels they went where three roads branched on a common:
They North, South, East, West; he back to the White Cat's castle.
Sadly he went, for he thought, 'Can a princess lie in a nutshell?'
Then to the castle he came, and stayed and stayed for a twelvemonth.
Then at the last he said, 'Dear Cat, I shall never be happy,
'Never get such a bride as you; if you were but a princess——
'Home must I go to my father, and never a bride behind me.'
'Leave it to me,' said the Cat; 'by the end of the week you shall have her.'
So when Saturday came she brought him a sabre—and, 'Cut off,'
Said she, 'my head and my tail.' But he shrank away in horror—
Only at last consented, and then—oh, wonder of wonders!—
Up from the ground arose a lovely ineffable princess,
Lovelier far than the cat, though she was lovely as Hebe.
Then to the palace they rode; and the King and the elder brothers
Said no more, for they felt that here was the bride and the kingdom
So next day they were married and happily lived ever after.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIEND.

Some years are profitless when we look back to them; others seem to be treasuries to which we turn again and again when our store is spent out—treasuries of sunny mornings, green things, birds piping, friends greeting, voices of children at play. How happy and busy they are as they heap up their stores! Golden chaff, crimson tints, chestnuts, silver lights—it is all put away for future use; and years hence they will look back to it, and the lights of their past will reach them as starlight reaches us, clear, sweet, vivid, and entire, travelling through time and space.

Our children have never ceased to speak of the delights of a certain August that some of us once spent in a Presbytery with thick piled walls and deep-cut windows and an old enclosed court-yard. The walls and windows were hung with ancient clematis hangings, green, and starred with fragrant flowers. These sweet tangled hangings swayed when the sea-wind blew village-wards;

sometimes a bird would start from some hidden chink, and send the white petals flying into the room where we were sitting at the open window, or upon the children's yellow heads, as they played in their shady corner of the court-yard. Played at endless games—at knights, kings and queens, sleeping beauties, fashionable ladies, owls in ivy towers, beggars and giants. Tiny Dodo and baby Francis are the giants, and Marjory and Binnie are the rescuing knights, and little Annie is the captive maiden with a daisy in her hat.

We have all been children at more or less distance of time, and we can all remember the wonderful long games, the roses and daisies of early youth—their sweet over-powering beauty. Once upon a time there was a great French cabbage rose at the end of a garden pathway, hanging to a wall behind which the sun always set. A little girl, a great many years ago, used to fly to that rose for silent consolation, and after half a lifetime, being still in need of consolation, came back to look for the rose—and found it. The rose was hanging to the wall, scenting the air in conscious, sweet flush of dignity. The charm was still there. Something of the same aspect seemed to cling to the straight poplar roads, to the west and the east of that wide and tranquil land—where the lights broke into clearer changes day by day. A family party had assembled after long separation. The elders and the children had come from two ends of the world; H. and I

arrived first, then came Major Frank and his wife, with their Indian boxes, H. scarcely believing in her own tender heart's happiness as she clasped her son once more. Its happiness had been hardly earned by many a long hour of anxious watch; by many a cruel pang of terrified parting. But she may rest now for a time. Hence bats, owls, apprehensions, newts' tongues, evil things!—come peace, innocent pleasures, good coffee, and fine weather, golden content, friends meeting, and peaceful hours in the old Presbytery, which has opened its creaking gates to us.

There is a court-yard in front of the house, enclosed by crumbling walls, wreathed, as I have said, with clematis and straggling vines, in neglectful profusion. Outside our great gate the village passes by, in blouses, in cotton nightcaps and cart wheels, in chattering voices, that reach us, with the sound of bells from the Norman tower of the church. We can hear them from the garden at the back of the house, which Madame Valentin, our landlady, cultivates herself, with the assistance of her cook. Madame is to be seen opening her shutters in her camisole and nightcap, to the sound of many early chirrupings and singings, in the light of morning dewdrops and rainbows. The old Presbytery garden of a morning seems all strung with crisp crystals. They break from the mossy apple trees, flash from the spiky gooseberry bushes, hang from trailing vine branches that the monks have nailed

up against the grey stone. It is almost a pity the monks are gone and have given place to the very unpoetic and untidy old lady we can see clipping her lettuces from the prior's room.

The children had never been abroad before, and to them (as to their elders, indeed) the commonest daily commonplaces of life in the little seaport were treats and novelties. The white caps, the French talk, the country-women and vegetables in the market-place, the swaddling babies, the fishermen coming up from the sea, with their brown bare legs and red caps, carrying great shining fish with curly tails. Madame Valentin, our landlady, herself was a treat to our children, though I must confess that their mother and H. and I all fled before her. There was also a certain Madame Baton next door who kept a poultry-yard, and who for Marjory and Binnie, and the rest of them, seemed to be a person of rare talent and accomplishment. She milked a cow (she kept it in a room opening out of her kitchen); she made lace on a cushion; she was enormously rich—so the bathing woman had said in the water. She clacked about in her wooden shoes for hours before the children were up, drove a cart, and had rabbits in a hutch. She wore a great white cotton night-cap, with a tassel at the end, which seemed to possess some strange attraction for little Binnie especially. One day I found the little girl standing alone with the old peasant woman in the court-yard, quietly facing Madame

Baton, with little folded hands, and asking endless questions in her sweet whistle, to which Madame Baton answered in the gruffest French, while the cow stood by listening and nodding its stupid head. Binnie could not understand what Madame Baton was saying, but she invented it all as it went on, and thought it was grandmamma's story (so she told us afterwards) about the cotton nightcaps. 'Would the cow and the farm fly away if Madame Baton took off hers?' said little Binnie; 'Oh, I wish, I wish she would try!'

H. used to tell the children a story about enchanted caps and hard-working peasant people, who prospered so long as they kept to their caps and laboured in their fields; but who lost all their prosperity when they threw off their homely headgear and went away in fine feathers and ribbons to walk in the streets of the neighbouring towns. Then came the sprites to clear their stores, to ruin their farms, to suck their eggs and milk their cows, and the hens ceased to lay, and the crops dwindled and dwindled, and the fish failed in the nets. It was a very self-evident little apologue, but Binnie and little Anne firmly believed in it. Marjory, who was older, had her doubts. Meanwhile, we all took to calling the place 'White Cotton Nightcap Country.' . . .

They are playing at ogres in the court-yard in front of the house to-day. H. and I sit listening to the happy little voices that reach us in a cool, green-lighted room,

which the priests once used as a refectory, and whence we hear all the choir, of flutes and dulcimers, of sweet childish prattling and piping in the sunny court. Our landlady looks out, in her camisole, from a bowery shutter; the priest, who is lodging in the empty wing of the house, crosses in the sunshine, with a long shadow zigzagging after him. The little golden-headed ogres stop short in their game to watch him go by. As he pushes at the great gateway, a lean, black-robed figure thrusting at the rusty bar, the swinging bell begins to ring, the great gates suddenly fly open, the priest starts away, and a stranger walks in quickly.

He carries no breviary in his hand, but a newspaper under his arm. He wears a straw hat, no black robes flap about him; but as he comes towards us, walking straight and quickly across the yard, H. and I, who from long habit guess at one another's thought, glance at the retreating priest, and then look at each other and think of the preachers who, coming in commonest garb, teach true things to true men; preach the love that endures the truth; preach with living voice and clear-eyed looks, scorn for oppression and for the mean surrender of the strong; preach help and wisdom for the weak; preach forbearance to the impatient; preach sacred endeavour; men, standing on the high step of a mighty altar, whose voices we of the great congregation listen to, day by day, as their noble words

touch enough
The verge of vastness to inform our soul. . . .

This friend has walked five miles from his village 'best loved of sea-coast nook-full Normandy' to welcome us.

There is a little gooseberry and pear tree orchard at the back of the house, where the vines are tangling green. Albinia and her husband have been sitting there for hours past on Madame Valentin's green bench. Kind H. carries off our friend to see her new-come children, who have travelled so many Indian miles to hold her hand once more, and our visitor has surely earned a broken chair and a cup of Angele's good coffee, after his hot and tiring walk. He must rest for an hour in the shade, while the day is burning on and ripening among the mossy things; the golden flames are in the pears hanging overhead, in the great dahlias blazing in gloomy splendour; the birds seem on fire as they flash past us; the clouds in heaven are tinted; the children come up in unwearied procession—they are fairies now, they say—except Francis, who is tired, and wants always to be an ogre. Then the bell begins to swing from the Norman tower.

Angele comes out and brings cups of milk and hunches of bread, and pinafores to match, and immediately the fairies become little children again, and quite ready for their tea. And meanwhile we elders sit in this

apple-tree bower, talking over one thing and another. As we talk on, of Angele with her wooden shoes and flapping cap, of the flat country, of the evening light, the quiet seaside place, that we like we know not why, the people living near; the poet puts a meaning into homely words, and touches us with his wings, as poets do, and out of common talk and of discordant things his genius strikes the key-note dominating all

CHAPTER II.

FAIRY LATOUCHE ENCHANTS THE CASTLE AND THE POOR LITTLE WHITE CAT.

Long after our guest had taken leave and walked home by the sands, we sat on in our garden. Madame Valentin came mysteriously through the twilight, carrying a lettuce for her supper; she also had a letter in one hand, which she was scanning in the moonlight.

'That gentleman who had been here; did he expect a letter?' she asked. 'Was his name Hug.?' The postman, knowing we were English, had sent the letter by the miller's wife. Madame Valentin explained that the postman was gone home, his aunt was ill; and then she showed us a letter, addressed, in a commercial hand, to 'Mr. Hugh Gourlay, Chateau de Latouche, Joyeux, Calvados.'

'But why do you not send it to the Chateau?' said H.; 'it is not for us.' Madame Valentin thought this a good suggestion; she had forgotten for the moment that they had English relations at the Chateau. Mademoiselle Blanche's mamma was an English Protestant; Mademoiselle was a good Catholic, notwithstanding. She was to

make her profession next month. Certainly, it was true, said Madame Valentin. There were those who, with Madame, perhaps, think it a pity, but she was not one of them. Mademoiselle de Latouche the elder was a saintly woman, and would never force her niece's inclinations. . . .

The crimes that people commit are not all done in a minute; they seem to come into existence, little by little —one by one—small selfish considerations, jars, vanities, indolences, they do not even come to a climax always. It is not a consoling reflection that the sum of the evil done by a respectable and easy-going life may be greater in the end perhaps than that of many a disastrous career. Notwithstanding Madame Valentin's opinion, it seemed to me that old Mademoiselle de Latouche put all her vanities, her selfishness, love of domination, into her religion. No wonder it was fervent. She kept herself from the world because she was lazy, and loved her own comfort better than anything else. She let the widows and orphans come and see her, or wait at her door till it was convenient to her to admit them; it rather amused her to dole out her small benevolences, and to hear their unreserved thanks. She certainly denied herself to, but not for, others.

She had made up her mind that Blanche was to edify the religious world of Joyeux and St. Rambert. The sturdy Chatelaine did not feel that her health was equal

to the rigid rule of a conventual life; but Blanche was younger, and of a less nervous temperament.

When anyone spoke of a different fate for the little thing, Mademoiselle replied placidly that Blanche herself had decided upon entering the cloister, and that it was a subject she did not care to discuss. It was her hour for repose or meditation, and she must beg leave to retire.

There were few people more difficult of access than Mademoiselle de Latouche, who, between her excessive pieties and vanities and long hours of slumber and refreshment, found life well filled, and scarcely sufficing to its enjoyments; above all, to its necessary repose. Woe betide the household if Mademoiselle was awakened suddenly! It is possible that there may have been a little sameness in Mademoiselle's life which was so entirely devoted to one person, and that person so disagreeable a one as herself, H. once said. But I think H. scarcely did the Chatelaine justice. Many people had thought her charming in her youth. She had a curious power of influencing people, of impressing her own opinions upon them, and leading them her own way. So few people have a will, that it does not require any great amount to make a great effect. She was handsome still. Little Blanche thought her aunt perfectly beautiful. She could talk agreeably when she liked, be generous on occasions; M. le Curé de St. Rambert seemed as if he had scarcely words to utter the benediction which flowed from his

heart as he left her room the day we did ourselves the honour of calling at the Castle. . . 'You will not receive him, most dear, most generous friend,' I heard the Curé saying as we came into the room. 'You must control your too generous impulses; promise me that you will not receive him.' He was a tall, lean man, standing in an attitude, over the old lady, who accepted his homage very placidly; but he rather overdid his warnings.

'It must depend upon my state of health,' murmured Mademoiselle de Latouche. 'I suffer greatly; do I not, Mathilde?'

'A martyrdom,' murmured the Curé.

'Yes; Mademoiselle has great courage,' said Mathilde. (She was the companion; a little lean, delicate woman, a great contrast to Mademoiselle, who was stout and flushed, with curly red hair, scarcely streaked with grey.) 'She is scarcely strong enough to receive a visitor, Perhaps these ladies may know the name—M. Gourlay—out of the Yorkshire.'

H., who always remembers names, said she had once known a Mr. Gourlay, a manufacturer: 'an elderly respectable man,' said H.

M. le Curé de St. Rambert all this time was standing in the window, blankly benevolent, with his hands meekly slipped into his sleeves. Little Mathilde had subsided into a chair near the door of an inner room. What a comfortable interior it was, rich and warm, with the

prosperous lady tucked up in her satin dressing-gown by the fire, with clocks of every century ticking and pointing to the hour! . . . 'This is Mademoiselle's hour for receiving,' they seemed to say—'three o'clock, three o'clock.' They seemed to be as obsequious as the rest of the household. Mademoiselle went on to explain—

'This gentleman, not knowing of my poor brother's death, has written to him on the subject of a machine, that I confess we had put away without much idea of future use. I have invited him to come over and examine it for himself. He makes me an offer for it which I consider sufficient, for my dear brother had initiated me into his affairs. A large offer. So much the better for your poor, M. le Curé,' she said, archly, speaking in the sing-song voice which is so much used by the extra good in common conversation. (At one time of my life I was inclined to respect this tacit profession of superiority, but I now doubt whether anything which is not in itself superiority is of much use, either to the impressor or to the impressed.)

'My poor will pray for you day and night,' said the Curé. 'Chère Mademoiselle, I have not yet seen our dear child!'

'She is in the next room, M. le Curé; Mathilde will call her, if you wish to see her. You will find her very happy, very firm in her determination. It is very beautiful,' she said, turning to us; 'I have two sisters in convents,

and this dear child, orphan daughter of my brother, is now about to profess. She has come home to bid us farewell—a sweet farewell for her—but for me the sacrifice is terrible—is it not, Mathilde?'

'Oh, yes, Mademoiselle! I tell her it is too much;' said Mathilde, nervously; and, appealing to the Curé: 'Monsieur, persuade them to defer this beautiful sacrifice. Mademoiselle needs the society of her niece. She often tells me that it is a new life to her.'

The Curé, I thought, looked slightly puzzled; he was about to speak, when the door from the inner room opened, and the 'Blanche' of whom they had been speaking came in. She was dressed in a white dress of some loose and soft material; she wore a big white apron, and her long sleeves fell over her hand, so that nothing showed but five little pink finger-tips. She came gently into the room, looked round, and then, seeing the Curé, 'You again?' she said, with a sort of hiss, stopped, darted back into the room from which she had just come, and softly closed the door.

It was all so sudden, so gentle, so swift, that we none of us knew what to say, until the Curé suggested 'timidité' after her long seclusion. Mademoiselle laughed, showing a row of white dazzling teeth. H. flushed up, and said it was time to go.

'I hope,' she said, as she took leave, 'that you may be able to make up your mind to keep your niece with you. I quite understand your feelings; a child with years of

happiness and usefulness before her—it is a fearful responsibility that you take when you put her away from it all.' H. stood looking into the old lady's face, with kind, constraining eyes.

'Oh, yes, indeed, madame!' said Mademoiselle, solemnly—and indeed she spoke with some emotion. 'But who would dare to go against a true vocation? Blanche is not the first in our family to give herself up to this holy service of love; and I, who am the last of the Latouches, must not shrink from my share of the sacrifice.'

H. could not trust herself to speak; she was almost crying, and quite overcome, and I was glad to get her away. There were all sorts of stories about the family at the Chateau. Madam Valentin, our landlady, worshipped 'the grande Mademoiselle,' as some of the people in the place used to call her. She was one of the privileged admitted to her presence. The Castle was left jointly to Mademoiselle and to Blanche—so she told us. 'At Mademoiselle's death everything would go to Blanche. Some people thought it strange that the father should have made such a will; but he knew with what a saint he had to deal,' said Madame Valentin. 'Look at this foulard!—it was hers, and she gave it to me.'

'A saint! Why does she not go into a convent herself?' said H., still trembling. 'That poor child is to be robbed of her life—of God's life—which is her right; she is told

that it will please Him that she should spend her strength and youth in dreams and prayers and repetitions. It makes my heart ache to think of it. . . . I have had sorrows enough, but oh! would I give up one of them, one parting, one pang of love, to have loved less——'

My dearest H.! I comforted her as well as I could, and then Frank came in, and we told him of our interview. 'I shall go up and call,' said the sociable Major; 'perhaps we may find out some way of rescuing your nun, mother. You shall give me an introduction to this Mr. Gourlay since you know him. I had always heard he was a very respectable man

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD KING AND HIS THREE SONS.

WHAT is a respectable man? Joseph Gourlay, of Gill Mills and Gilwick Manor, was a respectable man, very much looked up to in his own neighbourhood, of which indeed many acres belonged to him. Acres enclosing the handsome stone-fronted house in which he lived, in which his wife had died, in which his three sons had been born. All his life and his fortune seemed to be enclosed in the Yorkshire valley which you might see from the dining-room window, flooded with green, while sudden smoke-volleys burst from the tall chimneys of the mill. The valley is crossed again and again by the stream that comes dashing from its source in the distant hills, straight to the mills at the foot of the great crag Wick Gill sparkles with the fortunes of the Gourlays, dashing over rocks and ridges, a limpid and rainbow-tinted torrent, well fit, as Mr. Gourlay had foreseen long ago, to turn the creaking cogs of his water-wheels, to boil up his steam-engines, to wash and purify his cotton in many waters, while the threads of his fortune spun on their thousand bobbins,

glistening as they whirled, drawing wealth with every turn of the quivering line. Hugh, the youngest son, as he sat in the little counting-house, could hear the family fortunes beating time over head as they passed from the mountain gill and the raw cotton heaps to the Gilwick wharfs and to the bank; in family credit, and in carts and in waggons piled with the close packed bales of which his two brothers were so proud. Bathurst and Ben were soon to be admitted partners in the business. Hugh's turn was yet to come, but meanwhile he had perhaps found for himself another more absorbing interest undreamt of by Joseph and his elder sons. It was not one that Hugh could share with anyone. The habit of the house, the steady reserve, the north country mistrust of fine speaking and flimsy sentiment, had influenced the younger brother as well as his elders.

More than once old Gourlay had found Hugh leaning back, absorbed and forgetful, with a pile of unanswered letters on the desk beside him. The old man would tap him on the shoulder, point significantly at the heap, frown and stump off to his own well-worn desk in the inner room. What was there breeding in Hugh's mind? Often of late he had seemed scarcely himself, and answered vaguely. Was he getting impatient? was he like other young men? did he want to grasp more power in his hands? Old Gourlay had a morbid horror of giving up one shred of his hard-earned rule. He would suspect

others of doing that which he himself would have done unto them. He was both true and unjust in many of his dealings. He remembered his own early impatience of all authority. He had laboured hard to earn his own living and his children's. Now, he thought uneasily, the day was come when they were children no longer, but young men nearly as capable as he had been at their age. Sometimes old Gourlay would throw out gloomy hints of giving up work altogether, and look sharply into the young men's faces to catch their expression. Ben never had any expression at all in his round pink cheeks: Bathurst, who knew his father, and was not afraid of him, would burst out laughing: 'Yes, father, that would just suit you,' he would say. 'You might walk about with your hands in your pockets all day long; or you might take to croquet. Ben would give you some lessons.' Hugh sometimes flushed up, and a curious questioning look would come into his eyes, when his father talked of a change. It was this look his father could not understand. 'Well, Hugh,' he would cry impatiently, 'can't ye speak?' But Hugh would walk on in stolid silence; he was not so much at ease with his father as Bathurst, and he shut himself more and more away from him. Ben, who had nothing to shut up, might keep the talk going if he chose. Poor Hugh had reached one of the flat stages of existence. Life is scarcely to be compared to the inclined plane that people describe it, but to some-

thing in the shape of a pyramid, with intervals of steps between each effort. Hugh had made a great effort of late. He was not without the family good sense and determination, and he could see as plainly as his father or his brothers the advantage of a definite career and occupation. What he had within him might as well be expressed in the intervals of business as of leisure, but at the same time this strange feeling was swelling within him. An impatience and distaste for all he had been used to, a longing for fresh air, for expression, for better things than money-making. It is in vain some people lead monotonous lives. Events without form or sound, mental catastrophes, great sweeps of feeling and opinion, who is to guard against these silent, irresistible powers? He had tried to make friends with the mill hands, but he had tried wrongly, perhaps; anyhow, some discontent was set to his interference, and Mr. Gourlay had angrily forbidden anything of the sort in future.

There had been some words at the time. Hugh had walked over Gill Crag, feeling as if he could bear this slavery no longer. He envied the very birds their freedom as they flew across the path. He forgot that to be condemned to freedom from all care, restraint, internal effort, is, perhaps, the greatest bondage of all. But as yet I have said it was not for nothing that Hugh Gourlay had been born a Yorkshireman; he was sensible and clear-headed for all his impressionable poet's nature. It was

about this time that he began a book which he finished in after years, and published at his own expense; a sort of story embodying a system of practical philosophy.

Mr. Gourlay might have been relieved if he could have read his younger son's mind as clearly as the debit and credit figures in the books in his counting-house. It was not his father's power that Hugh envied and would have grasped. It was something very far distant from old Gourlay's horizon, a voice coming he knew not whence that haunted him as an evil spirit, 'You are wasting your life, it is wasting, wasting, wasting.' The turning wheels had seemed to say so, the torrent had seemed to say so, every event of the day and every dream of the night had only seemed to repeat it.

Minor poets, people born with a certain fervour and sensibility which does not amount to genius, are often haunted by this vague impatience. They require the domination of the unforeseen, the touch of greater minds to raise them from themselves. They have the gift of imposing their own personality upon the things around them, upon the inanimate sights they see, upon the people they live with; and then they weary of it—common life only repeats their own moods to them, instead of carrying them away from themselves. Great poets are different; they are as Nature herself is—supreme, indifferent. Their moods may be storms or mighty calms, or the broad stream of daylight falling upon common

things, but they are masters all the while, not servants; and yet even servants faithfully working need not be ashamed, either of their work or of the impulse which urges them on and tells them they are unprofitable at best.

After church on Sundays (Mr. Gourlay was very particular about attendance in the church) it was the family habit to walk straight to the back yard and let the dogs out of their kennels, and to march round and round the grounds until the dinner bell rang. Family discussions often take place on Sundays. This family usually walked in silence with the dogs yelping and leaping at its heels. The garden was very green and very black, as these north country places are. Tall chimneys showed above the golden birch trees; iron hurdles fenced off the green clipped lawn; the beds were bordered with some patent zinc ornament; geraniums were blooming in leaden pots. In one place there was an iron fountain with a statue, in another a tin pavilion. A grass-cutting machine stood in one corner of the lawn, with a hose for watering the plants; doubled-locked greenhouses were built along the western walls, with alternate domes and weathercocks for ornament. There was a croquet lawn planned by Ben, who was the sociable member of the party; and beyond the garden and the mill and the sheds lay the valley, wide and romantic as Yorkshire valleys are, with rocks enclosing, with rising turfy crags, leading

to widening moors, and the sound of water and the cry of birds coming clear in the Sunday silence. Ben was whistling as he walked along. Hugh was trying to get up his courage to make a certain request he had at heart. Bathurst was leaping the iron fence, followed by two of the dogs. 'Hi, Ju! well leaped,' cried Mr. Gourlay, who was always very fond of his dogs. 'Father cares first for the mill, then for the dogs. I don't know where we come,' Bathurst used to say to his brothers. To-day Mr. Gourlay was not so absorbed in Ju's performance as to forget his sons entirely. He looked round uneasily—

'Where is Hugh? Look up, Hugh. What is the matter with him, Ben? he seems always moping.'

Hugh had stopped short, and was looking at the gravel path in a dreamy, dazed sort of fashion. Hearing himself called, he looked up. 'Father,' he said, suddenly, 'I—I have been wishing to speak to you for some time; I may as well speak now. I want a change. I—Will you let me go to college for a couple of years? You said yesterday that you would make me an allowance. Will you give me two years at college?'

There was a dead silence. Ben, as usual, began to whistle; Bathurst came back with a leap over the hurdle. Then the old man spoke—'No, that I will not do,' said Mr. Gourlay, growing very red and looking Hugh full in the face, and striking one of the iron fences sharply with his stick. 'College! what has put such d—— stuff into

your head, Hugh? Who wants college here? I am a plain man of business. Have I been to college? But I have made my own fortune and yours by my own brains; d'ye think they will teach you brains at those places? What the devil is it ye want? Is it to fine-gentleman it over your brothers and father?' Old Mr. Gourlay was working himself up as he went on more and more vehemently. 'Two years—just when you are beginning to understand the business. Is this your gratitude for all that's been done for you? Look at me, sir; you know as well as I do that if I choose to give up work this day, I could leave off now this minute and not change one shilling's worth in our way of living. Here I am, a rich man and respected in all the place: have I gone off with quirks and fancies in my head? No; I have stuck to my work like a man, and paid my way, and given in charity too upwards of——'

Here Bathurst, who was devoted to his younger brother, tried to stem the storm. 'Father, Hugh hasn't your head for business, not even mine, but he has something I have not got. He can see what is amiss, and bring a new light to it, while I can only try to keep things straight with the help of the old lamp. Hugh saved us 1,500*l.* last year by that alteration in the spinning mules. There is that Frenchman's patent he was speaking of last night, for spinning fine yarns; it would be the very thing now we are getting in the new machinery. He saw that, and so do I now that he has mentioned the matter.'

'Hollo! Bat,' said Mr. Gourlay, recovering his temper and wheeling round suddenly; 'it was not college learning put that into Hugh's head. Come now, let us make terms. He wants a change, does he? let him go over and travel for a bit, and see about the Frenchman's patent; I remember it. I'll write him a line. He left me his address, and Hugh shall go and see it. We will put by our savings to pay for it, hey, Hugh?' wheeling round and facing his youngest son, 'against the time ye bring me home a daughter-in-law to help to spend the profits. Will that satisfy ye?'

And so it came about that Hugh Gourlay started one summer's day for Normandy with full instructions as to the address of the ingenious Frenchman, who was to add to their fortunes. His father had given him one other commission. He was also to bring home a French poodle. Mr. Gourlay had long wished for one.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNGEST STARTS ON HIS TRAVELS IN SEARCH OF A DOG, FINE LINEN, AND A FAIR BRIDE.

HUGH tried some short cut from the great seaport where he landed that led to Joyeux, the little fishing village to which he was going, and the short cut turned into a long belated journey, leading him by closing shadows and rough country ways, by high cliffs, into a windy darkness, through which he travelled on hour after hour, listening, as he jolted on in the little country cart, to the sudden bursts of a wild storm chorus, shrieking above the angry moan of the not distant sea. The sea note changed sometimes with the wind that blew the pipes of this giant music; but the rain dropped monotonously all the while, and the jolts and creaks of the wheels turning upon stones, and the muttering of the driver, did not vary very much. The driver was drenched, notwithstanding his striped woollen blanket; he was an old man, and he seemed to have accumulated many oaths in the course of a long life. The horses were patient, struggling and stumbling. Hugh had pulled his wideawake well over his eyes, and sat con-

tentedly enough watching the solitary storm overhead, listening to the thunder of breakers, and the onslaught of wind and water. It all seemed to take him out of himself, and he felt as if he could breathe again for the first time for many days.

'If I had known, I should not have come out with my horses on such a night,' said the driver. 'Poor people have to go thro' all sorts of cruelties to please the rich. Heu! Eu! Who knows?' he went on grumbling: 'if the truth were told, we many of us have got as much credit at the bank as those who call themselves masters. There is Madame Baton—devil take me, I wish the horses were in her stable now—she has 10,000 francs of income, and more than that. Heu! Eu! . . He does not understand one word—imbecile Englishman.' . . Poor old Pierre might be forgiven a little ill-humour under the circumstances. His was not a morbid nature. For him the storm only brought rheumatism. He did not aspire to anything beyond a good feed of corn for the horses, a glass of hot wine and a pipe for himself, and a supper off garlic-stew that Madame Baton was famous for concocting. For him the inner voice only said, eat, smoke, drink, Peter Bonvin, and to-morrow when you die M. le Curé will see to the candles for the altar of the Virgin, and get you into Paradise, by his knowledge of the prayers and the saints. Pierre was not without hope that there might

be as good wine in Paradise as at Madame Baton's. Why not?

'Chateau Latouche,' says Pierre, as they shook and clattered under a dripping beech avenue that led to the village. 'It is the house opposite the church,' and as he spoke in the darkness they seemed to pass between sudden walls and the swaying of trees at night. Was that booming the sea or the wind among the church bells? Chill mistful night-spirits seemed about, a stir, a scent of leaves and clematis—old Pierre began to swear once more by many R's and S's, he could not find his way one bit, and the wind was rising—again the church clock struck ten, and everything seemed asleep. The children were asleep in the little room out of mine, and a night-light burned dimly in the window. I could just see the two little yellow heads lying on the pillow, and the great black crucifix hanging to the wall. Everything was silent in the great overgrown garden except for the sudden gusts of wind and rain. A mouse ran across the room as I sat reading, the lamp spluttered, and suddenly the surly bell in the court-yard began to ring. It startled us all. Frank was away. Albinia had gone to bed early. H., who was sitting talking to her by her bedside, came running to me and found me on my way downstairs. 'Can it be the Major,' she said; 'is he come back?'

I said I would see, and as I got into the yard the bell rang again, and a sudden fury of wind put out my lamp.

Old Pierre's voice sounded from without, growling and grumbling, and then a younger and pleasanter sound came on the wind.

'Is this the Chateau Latouche; are we expected?'

Poor things! I was sorry to send them on their way through the storm for another half-mile along the road; but what could I do? It was impossible to take in old Pierre, to say nothing of the horses and the strangers.

Nowadays suppers scarcely exist except at the play in Alfred de Musset's poems. Mademoiselle de Latouche had supped in her youth, and still more in her old age did she persistently cling to the good old custom. She was never hungry at dinner-time, she said, and the evenings seemed long at the Castle, and Mathilde liked supping cosily by the fire in the little dining-room. Sometimes M. le Curé de Joyeux would join the ladies on these occasions; sometimes M. le Curé de St. Dives; St. Dives was another little fishing village on the coast, of which the road ran past the gates of the pretty old Castle. How pretty it looked, the old Castle, on fine summer evenings when the grove of chestnut trees rustled, and the moon dropped behind the pointed roofs and the towerets, with their Normandy caps; and the lights show from one window and another—from Mademoiselle's dressing-room, from the great hall and the little saloon, in Blanche's tower over the door-way.

Hugh was looking for the entrance when a sudden flash of lightning illuminated the whole front of the old house—out of blackness shone a fairy palace. The window-panes, the gilt gateway, the very nails on the front door, wet with rain, shone like jewels and enamel; the roses and creepers clustering from the balcony overhead bloomed into sudden life. Each tiny star and flower was fragrant and dropping a diamond drop. Hugh's hand was wet with flowery dew as he let go the iron bell. The flash was gone, and everything was dark again.

He did not, however, have long to wait. The doors were opened by some string or pulley from within, and old Pierre made a sign implying that he was to enter. The Castle was a curious mixture of various tastes and fancies that had crossed the minds of its different inhabitants. The hall was large and empty; a Louis Quinze interior, with old-fashioned chairs and shining boards; a great fire burnt at one end, in a tall chimney-piece; a great clock ticked upon a bracket of which the hands pointed to ten; the family arms were fixed at intervals along the walls. These consisted of hands enscrolled with a band upon which was written 'Tenir,' the motto of the Latouches, and each hand held a light. Hugh was rather bewildered by this sudden blaze, and if old Pierre had not given him a push from behind, might have hesitated to cross the threshold. There was not only light to dazzle, but a confusing sound of music coming from some inner room, and

a very sweet and melancholy voice singing to the accompaniment of a piano, singing to rocking measure: it went running on in his head for many days after:—

Mais de vous en souvenir
Prendrez vous la peine,
Mais de vous en souvenir
Et d'y revenir——

A minor chord, and a melodious little flourish.

A Saint Blaize à la Zuecca
Dans les prés fleuris cueillir la verveine.

A door opened, the voice ceased singing, an old man-servant came out with a white respectful head, followed by a little woman in a grey dress, carrying a lamp. She seemed to pat or drift across the floor, so lightly made and pale and slim was she. Was it possible that this could have been the songstress? She spoke in a little flute-like voice that was scarcely above a whisper. Old Peter undertook to be master of the ceremonies.

'He does not understand one word of French,' he said, pointing to Hugh. 'Madame expects him. It is all right. I am going to put the horses in the stable.'

The little grey lady evidently expected her guest. She bowed, whispered a few words to the man-servant, and gave him the lamp, and the old man beckoned to the young traveller and led the way across the black and white marble pavement of the hall to a side door opening into a great drawing-room, brilliantly lighted, decorated

with panelling, hung with white and brown damask. Everywhere stood lovely old china, and ticking clocks (Mademoiselle de Latouche had a fancy for clocks), but there was no one to wind them up; their hands pointed to every possible hour and in every direction. The place seemed enchanted to Hugh after his long dark journey, dazzling and unexpected. The piano was open, but the musician was gone; a pair of gloves lay upon the floor by a little table, upon which stood, along with some slight refection of finger-biscuits, a scarcely touched glass of wine. Hugh, who was hungry after his long expedition, cast a glance at this little table; but his guide beckoned him on, and presently led him through a small boudoir into a bedroom on the ground floor, opening into a comfortable set of rooms, from whence the grey lady suddenly issued, in her list slippers. She had been to see that all was in order—the last match in the match-box; the pink soap and water in the cruet-like washstand; the eider-down floating on the natty little chintz bed.

It would be difficult to imagine anything more unlike the steady fourpost respectability of Hugh Gourlay's own home than this little chintzified nest which had been prepared for him, with a small sofa to recline upon, a blue glass inkstand, a little cup of holy water over the bed, the glazed and painted portraits of one or two amiable-looking young saints, the sugar and water apparatus on the smart walnut drawers, and a neat little square mat for his feet.

Hugh imagined his brothers' expression at seeing him thus installed, but no Bathurst was there with sarcastic jeers, nor Ben with ill-suppressed fits of laughter.

'I hope you will find all you want,' murmured the lady. 'The supper will be ready immediately, if you will take the trouble to come down.'

As she spoke, a girl in a Normandy cap came in with a jug of hot water; the old servant rolled up a comfortable arm-chair; a second man, who had come in, rapidly unpacked Hugh's portmanteau.

'Has Monsieur got everything?' the girl began to ask in a loud shrill voice. The lady put her fingers to her lips: 'Hush, Madame sleeps!' she said.

Hugh could understand just so much. The servants now seemed to creep about with redoubled care. The house was perfectly still with a faint aromatic perfume that Hugh associated with it ever after.

Hugh was not many minutes dressing and drying his wet hair and hands, and he was just ready when some one came tapping at the door. A hungry man with a less knowledge of the language might have understood the meaning of the word *souper*, which some one uttered in the same whisper as the others.

There were two places laid, but the little grey woman came in and motioned to the young man to begin, and Hugh sat down to a solitary meal. The grey woman was in and out of the room attending to his wants with the

greatest kindness and assiduity, but whenever he had attempted to speak, she smilingly placed a finger on her lips and pointed to the adjoining room. What she meant he could not conceive; but meanwhile he went on with his meal, and did ample justice to the excellent food that was set before him in white *soupières*, *marinières*, and fruit-dishes and hot plates, all of foreign and unusual shape. An omelette came in leaping in the dish; there was even a slice of melon, and some champagne in a long-necked bottle. Hugh finished off one dish after another, not a little surprised and amused by his adventure, and looking often to the door in hopes of seeing it open. When he had quite done, the little housekeeper came creeping in once more in her list slippers, carrying a little tray with coffee and with liqueurs. Then she crossed and softly opened the door into the adjoining room, and the mystery was explained. Hugh saw a large and well-furnished drawing-room. A lamp burnt dimly in one corner, casting its circling green light all round about. The rays fell upon polished floors and furniture of ancient date. There were bookcases and cabinets, brass locks and shadows; an old looking-glass repeating the scene; an ancient bureau, open and heaped with paper, against the wall. The windows were still closed and safely barred against the storm. On one side of the table stood a great arm-chair, and in the chair reclined a sleeping figure. The housekeeper crept with a noiseless tread across the

room; behind the nodding head she gently placed a pillow, and then returned as swiftly as she had entered. But Hugh had time to see his hostess. The light fell full upon Mademoiselle de Latouche's profile. Even in her sleep she seemed to hold her own and to reign from her slumbers.

Then the attendant gently closed the door, and Hugh turning round found that he was no longer alone. A young lady, dressed in white, had entered the room—a beautiful person—who advanced part of the way towards him with an undulating movement, and then stopped short. Hugh thought at first that she was going to run away.

'Are you there, Mathilde?' she said; and then the little grey woman stepped forward from behind and said something in French, and once more the lady turned towards her guest.

'My aunt has taken her sleeping draught,' she said in broken English. 'We need not be afraid of awakening her.' Then, turning to Hugh. 'You must be fatigued after voyaging all day; you must repose and refresh yourself. Will you not sit?'

Hugh had started respectfully to his feet. This beautiful young creature was a very young lady, although her costume was scarcely suitable to a girl, for the dress was of some sort of white stuff, trimmed with swan's down; her beautiful little head was set softly into a thick lace ruffle; she had an innocent round face with two wondering

and tender eyes. Her soft brown hair was smoothly parted in a Madonna line. She came forward very gently, hesitating, with soft footsteps and burning cheeks. When she spoke to Hugh her voice seemed to vibrate with a peculiar tone; but then she was speaking English, and carefully considering her words. She sat down at the table.

She did the honours very prettily, with a gentle hesitation and swift precision. Coffee was served. There was not much talk, but a clinket of cups and silver spoons, and somehow, when all was over, Hugh seemed to have made his hostess's acquaintance. He had been rather afraid of her at first, and had scarcely known what to say; but she once asked him to give her some milk, and then looked up with eyes that innocently asked for confidence; and he began to feel as if he knew her somehow upon the strength of that one inquiring glance.

The hands of the clock were now pointing to eleven, and the old man began to clear away the belated little meal. 'Good-night,' said the lady, in her pretty English. 'I hope my aunt will be well enough to receive you in the morning; I am sorry that I shall have to leave home for the day.'

'Oh, Mademoiselle!' remonstrated the companion.

The young lady gave her a little pat on the cheek. 'Will you be quiet, Mathilde?' she said.

Hugh held out his hand, English fashion. She half put hers out—then pulled it back again; and, as she

did so, he saw that a gold bracelet was fastened to her arm, to which hung a tiny gold locket with a picture.

The lady had told Hugh her name before they parted; she was Blanche de Latouche, she said; Mademoiselle de Latouche was her aunt, and Hugh went to bed not dreaming of his hostess, but of her niece.

CHAPTER V.

THE GRAND ENTERTAINMENT TO WHICH THE PRINCE ACCOMPANIES THE WHITE CAT.

THE court-yard opened upon the high road, the high road led to the village, where everybody was up, and awake and excited. For hours past the church bells had been jangling, and a gun had been going off at intervals. It woke up Hugh Gourlay at the same minute as M. le Maire, and old Mademoiselle de Latouche in her warm bed. In the Presbytery the children were jumping about in great excitement. It was pretty to see the little cluster in the court-yard—the babies in front, the little elder girls, in their broad hats, peeping at M. le Curé and his assistant, as they passed and re-passed through the gateway. H., who never can resist the children's voices, was also there, with a lace veil over her head. Madame Valentin was discoursing to the tobacconist out of her bedroom window as usual. He had stepped into the court in his wooden shoes to borrow an umbrella. 'Ah! you will all want umbrellas,' says Madame Valentin sagely. 'My son

started an hour ago. He is not in the procession; he goes to receive the Archbishop with the other gentlemen.'

All this time a procession had been forming, rain and mud notwithstanding—talkative, excited. French people certainly have a special art for holding umbrellas, tidily defying the elements; their starch keeps stiff, their garments are dry, their spirits undamped, at times when an English temper would be drenched. Perhaps in the long run we might best withstand the onslaught of adverse circumstances; but certainly for brief adversities we have little patience. The procession started at last, to the peal of bells, to the barking of dogs—windows opened, the church porch was crowded, people joining in from every doorway, late recruits following as fast as they could go. The women wore clean white skirts and starched white caps with satin ribbons; the men were dressed in their usual Sunday best—flagbearers had the additional glory of a green rosette. Monsieur le Curé and Monsieur le Vicaire were both there, encouraging and marshalling their troops. They had their breviaries under their arms, they wore their beautiful muslin stoles, their octagonal caps. The choristers were also in full dress, and the church beadle, in his long flapping gown, came away from the bell which he had been ringing uninterruptedly since four o'clock in the morning.

A few cap-strings joined still hot from the ironing board where Madame Wachtel had been standing unin-

terruptedly labouring for twenty-four hours. Poor woman, she now sank down exhausted. She had counted upon going herself; there was her own jupe all ready, but she was too tired to move—tired! she was broken, there was no other word. Ah! there goes Mademoiselle Blanche; is it possible that she walks on foot when she might drive in her aunt's carriage?

Hugh, who had dressed and come out to see what was going on, now appeared in the market-place. He had seen Blanche pass his window, which was just about four feet from the ground, and on a level with people's heads. Mathilde, of the night before, was following with a waterproof, and expostulating as she went. 'You will catch cold,' he heard her say; 'your aunt—the carriage——,' and then Blanche's sweet, cross, shrill 'Do you suppose that in the convent?' . . . and so they passed on.

The whole thing seemed to Hugh like some sort of fantastic continuation of his dreams. Still more so when he found himself, an hour later, steadily plodding in the wake of the retreating procession that was disappearing beyond the horizon of the sloping field. He had remained a little behind, talking to H., with whom he had stiffly claimed acquaintance as she stood in the gateway, on the strength of the night before; and, as usually happened in such cases, in return for his stiff excuse, she had charmed him by her kind manner and sweetness of greeting. That pale and tremulous H. has a gentle genius quite her own. It

is not only sympathy, not only kind-heartedness, it is a peculiar instinct (springing in truth from a kind heart and a quick and delicate intellect), which teaches her to understand the silent language of the people she meets, as well as their spoken words. Some persons can play the piano; others, with a look, can tune a far nobler instrument. I often envy H. her gift, dearly as she pays for it. We can most of us sympathise, but to understand is a subtler quality. Unselfish sympathy, that forgets itself and does not obtrude, is the sweetest and rarest of all. Sometimes as she comes in, in her black dress and mourning garb, I look into H.'s pale face, with its sweet pensive lines; old and worn as it is, it seems to me fairer than many a young and brilliant beauty; its sudden smile is more tender and radiant. Some bright tempers are a little oblivious, carried away by their own excitement; H. is not so; she is hopeful and quietly pleased, because her heart is humble and full of love, and by her example she teaches us to practise this happiness of gentleness and faith, and to believe in it, even though it may not always be for us.

Hugh promised to come and see us again, and then walked off across the field in pursuit of the procession, that was now rapidly disappearing beyond the horizon. In order to save time he had tried another of his short cuts, and wandered into the boggy centre of a turnip-field, and was glad to scramble out of it into the pathway again. The

land was monotonous enough, plains on every side, here and there a village crowding, white against the sky. Overhead mountains and valleys were tossing, and a storm was still impending, although the sun had come out bright for the present, and as it gleamed from the mountainous clouds above to the flat plains below, Hugh could see the little village, and the spire of the Castle a couple of miles away.

Sometimes some tune comes haunting one, one knows not why, and to-day a wild Hungarian dance music, that Hugh had once heard by chance, seemed to him to be ringing in his mind, and echoing from across the plains, and from the distant line of breakers. Then some soft burst of wind would catch it up and carry it into the drifting clouds, and then a light would seem to break out suddenly and repeat the tune in another key. People have odd associations at times. All this grey light and swiftness overhead, all this desolation under foot, over which the slippery lights were flickering; the sea-birds flying upon the wind; the excitement and strangeness of the scene; seemed best expressed by this tune that was haunting him, and which he associated ever after with that morning's chase. He caught the procession up at last, and as he did so the tune died away. One or two stragglers had already fallen out of the ranks. There was Madeleine Mathieu, the baker's daughter, carefully holding her white petticoats out of the mud,

and naturally too much engrossed by this occupation to think of much else. Hugh soon discovered Mademoiselle de Latouche struggling with the flapping tongue of the village flag, to which a piece of ribbon had been tied, and which it was her duty to hold. She was dressed in white, as were the others; she wore a little white bonnet, tied under her chin.

'I fear you are tired, my child,' said M. le Curé, coming up. He was walking along the ranks and encouraging his starched flock. 'Madeleine, if you come here, Mademoiselle Blanche will be able to rest.'

They had come out from the fields by this time into the highway, which was becoming more and more crowded every minute. Blanche recognised Hugh as she passed him, and nodded kindly; but she seemed tired, and there was no spirit in her greeting. The sight itself was amusing enough—a quaint scene of genuine country life. Here was a group of peasant-women, proudly striding alongside of the soutane, the glory of the family. The brother, the priest, walked with his thick shoes and flapping skirts, the proud old mother by his side in her old-fashioned Normandy cap and kerchief: the modernised sisters in cheap white satin quillings. Then some little children and some nuns went hurrying by to one of the convents in the town; a little farther, some recruits, who had been very tipsy the day before, were still parading their ribbons; and with it all came an eager cheerful hum

and chatter of voices, to which every moment brought additional notes; through every gate of the little town to which the procession was bound, the people were pouring.

The choir of Joyeux rang shrill and loud, the rain had ceased, the hedgerows and willow trees were fresh in the narrow field ways, the feet of the many pilgrims had worn a track, as they passed on plodding peacefully through the nineteenth century to worship at the shrine of three hundred years before. There goes Femme Roulot, the farmer's wife, in her great-grandmother's earrings; there goes a priest from the seminary, who was born twenty years ago, perhaps, but who is living with St. Benedict and others the life of their day. The way is long, the path is wet and slippery. Poor little Blanche stumbled many a time before she finished her weary three miles; she was unused to such fatigue, and could scarcely drag her tired feet along; the crowd bewildered her; she clung to her ribbon, and tried to think of the hymn that the country girls were singing as they marched. This was what she had hoped, to find herself one of a goodly company pressing onward to the true burning shrine of religion; but she was tired; her spirits flagged; her attention wandered from the words of the psalm; she found herself mechanically counting the jerks of the flagstaff as it crossed and recrossed the priest's little black velvet cap. Suddenly, as she clung

to the green ribbon of the flag, the great prop and main-mast itself seemed to give way—there was a shriek. . . .

Barriers had been put up round about the chapel, but just outside the barriers Hugh thought things looked a little uncomfortable. It was all good-natured enough, and the people were only pushing in fun; but with so many girls and children in the crowd, it was certainly dangerous fun. There was a sudden cry that the bishop's carriage was at hand, a sudden heave, and somehow, before anyone knew why, a wave passed through the crowd, some women screamed. Madeleine, the banner-bearer, slipped and fell: Louise the washerwoman sprawled over her, a little pale and fainting figure almost fell into Hugh's arms. There might have been a serious accident if M. le Curé, who was a strong man, and Hugh, who was active and ready, had not thrown themselves forward together and made a sort of rampart against the surging crowd. Hugh would not have been greatly concerned for Madeleine, who was well able to bear any amount of pushing, or for Louise, who was loudly bewailing herself—but he still held up with one arm the almost senseless little lady of the Castle; it had been his fate to rescue her; and he was relieved when the pressure subsided, and he could carry her out of the crowd into a quiet corner of the great place outside the barrier.

Blanche revived, smoothed her hair, rubbed her eyes, and sat on a step trembling a little and silent, and biting

her lips. She did not even say 'Thank you;' that wild sea of heads and struggling arms was still about her, and she had scarcely regained her presence of mind.

Then she heard Hugh asking if she felt better, and found that she was safe and once more able to breathe; and in one moment more she was herself again, still mechanically shaking out her crumpled lace and smoothing her dress.

'You will have to go home now,' said Hugh, in a tone of some satisfaction. 'What induced you to come to such a place, mademoiselle? It is all very well for those peasant women, but for you ——.' The innocent eyes looked up.

'For me? Why should I not do as they do?' said Blanche, turning pale again at the very thought. 'Oh, how wet I am! Is it not disagreeable to be wetted? Is that a carriage? Perhaps—Ah! here is Monsieur le Curé.'

Monsieur le Curé emerged with Madeleine, who was all over mud, and anxious to return to a clothes-brush. Hugh had hoped to be allowed to escort his hostess back to the Castle; but this was not according to French etiquette.

'I shall not thank you,' said Blanche, as she took leave of Hugh. 'You saved my life, but it was scarcely worth the trouble. You need not hurry home, but remember that my aunt dines at six.'

A little carriage happened to be passing (it had been setting down some farmers from Vitry, a couple of miles off), and into the carriage Mademoiselle de Latouche and

Madeleine were assisted and they drove off together, mutually condoling, two white women rolling along the green poplar avenue. M. le Curé hurried after his flock; Hugh (who had had no breakfast) made his way into the town; all sorts of refreshments were being prepared for the use of the pilgrims. Such pious excursions should give good appetite.

Hugh felt somewhat remiss as he walked home to dinner that evening. He feared that he had neglected his duties as a guest; but in truth he had been so well amused, that he had forgotten all about the unseen lady, who might probably be expecting him.

In the village there was a great frying and a clatter; all the bathers were enjoying their evening meal at open doors and windows; with kitchens in full play, with great talking and discussion. Some had brought their tables out into the street itself, for the heat was excessive, and the lodgings for the most part close and overcrowded.

A sort of Scriptural gleam was upon the sea, in the air, upon the sea-shore; a sort of Bethlehem-like star was peering from the eddying heights; two women were standing by a well not far from the Castle garden talking together as they pulled the iron handle of the crank. They were still in their white dresses and white frilled caps. 'It has been the day of Heaven,' said one to the other. 'We crossed the field singing in choir. Mademoiselle Blanche led the hymn. What a pity that she was so frightened in

the crowd! It was nothing coming back. M. le. Curé found the dryest, nicest way. Look, I am not weary, and yet I have been on my feet since three o'clock this morning. Ah! our Curé is a good man. I would not exchange for him of St. Rambert, though he drove in the Bishop's carriage.'

'Well, make haste,' said the other in a low, satisfied voice. 'Here is the storm again.' And as she spoke once more the clouds seemed to gather swiftly from every quarter, from the sea, from the plains, heaping dark clouds. There was a general shriek and flight: children scampered; careful *menagères* remained to clear the board; a great peal of thunder shook the air, and a swift whirlwind came eddying up with fierce dust and furious onslaught.

The storm did not last very long, and when it was over the sky cleared as suddenly as it had overclouded; the cloud-banks sank away, and the sunset, which had been tranquilly going on through all the clatter and excitement, came once more blazing gorgeously through the broken clouds and flooding the evening world. The drops of rain on the clematis that overhung the garden door reflected this splendid light; every stone was radiant. The very clapper sounded sweet and most musical in the clear and fragrant calm that followed the crash of angry clouds and storm. If the very wall was beautiful, the garden too was transfigured as Hugh walked in, admitted by Denise with her apron over her head.

'Here you are! What a noise!' says she; 'were you caught in it? Mademoiselle Blanche has told us how you saved her. We have been frightened. Mademoiselle our mistress has had a nervous attack. That poor Casimir had to go out in all the rain for the doctor. Ah, we poor servants! we are the same as our masters. Thunder disagrees with me just as much as with our mistress. See how I tremble. And as for little Marie, the kitchenmaid, she is in the back cupboard. She won't come out.'

Hugh might have shown more sympathy if he could have spoken more French; with some satisfaction he gathered, however, that he had not been missed. He nodded, and Denise took it for granted he agreed in all she said. The prince in the fairy tale is conducted from chamber to chamber through jewelled and incandescent halls; my prince was only led under the vine trellis. But what jewelled galleries could be more beautiful than these green and garlanded loggias, through which the burning evening garden was shining in clear, invigorating life? As he came from under the vines, he saw a common monthly rose tree, from every thorn of which a rainbow seemed to break and flash as Denise swept by with her heavy cloth skirt. There was one rose of which the colours seemed to glow beyond light, deeper and dearer, and more splendid than any words. The flower burnt on, and Hugh stopped in admiration; Denise, however, pointed to the stable clock.

'Make haste,' she said, 'dinner will be ready;' and

the young man understood that he was to lose no time. Denise hurried on quickly to her kitchen, past rose perfume and sweet verbena and geranium leaves. Mademoiselle had not recovered from the agitation caused by the storm, she did not come down to dinner, and Blanche again did the honours.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRINCE STAYS ON AT THE WHITE CAT'S CASTLE.

MADEMOISELLE DE LATOUCHE was reported still indisposed next day. Only Mathilde and Blanche were there when Hugh, who had risen early, walked into the breakfast-room from the garden. He had been down to the village, bathed, reconnoitred the place.

The cheerfulness and clatter of it all first struck our friend Hugh; and, for the first time, he understood that besides one's life and one's habits there is such a thing as the state of mind in which people and their neighbours habitually live. It is quite independent of circumstances, and represents the measure from which they start. Whether one state of mind is more desirable than another was not the question he asked himself. He had been used to look with something like scorn upon anything that was good-humoured and temporary: a stern realisation of the terrors of life, and a heavy plod along its pitfalls, had always seemed to him the most reasonable aspect to contemplate. Here were people enjoying the present to

its uttermost, neither fearing the future as some people advise, nor regretting the past as some others recommend.

Early as it was, all the bathers were already out on the sands; a strange and motley crowd assembled. Roman figures standing draped, admiring the horizon, reading the paper, and contemplating the sea before casting their long white togas aside and venturing into the water. Ladies in sandalled feet, closely garbed in woollen stuffs, banded and filleted like any Tullias and Cornelias out of a gallery of statues; little noisy boys and girls playing on the shore or capering down from the bathing boxes, our own children piling their castle. It is all present as I write, the heave of the crisp horizon, the flash of brine, the faint sparkle of distant promontories. People complain and with reason of being misunderstood; surely there are moments when every grain of sand, every gleam of light, seems to respond to the uttermost need of one's being, and to complete and to satisfy.

Under all these cheerful influences Hugh came back to the chateau frivolously whistling, with his hands in his pockets, and prepared to eat, drink coffee, and transact business; he passed old Pierre with clean straw in his sabots, cracking a cheerful morning whip.

The breakfast was set out on the oilskin table-cover, a dish of piled-up fruit stood in the centre, surrounded by bowls of coffee, and a loaf three feet long, from which

Mathilde was cutting liberal hunches. Blanche was breakfasting in the sunshine; she was sitting just where the light fell upon the oak parquet, she was still dressed in white, demurely sipping her milk. She still looked a little pale, after her fright the night before.

'Here is the English gentleman!' said Mathilde, looking up, and she opened the window to let their visitor in. As she did so, all the morning aureole, birds' songs, and fresh and renovating light rushed in.

'Thank you, Mathilde,' said Blanche; 'and now give us something more to eat quickly, for this is a fast-day, and I am hungry. I should like some more cream.'

Mademoiselle Mathilde hurried off enchanted. Fast-day or feast-day, she never ate anything herself, but her pleasure was to provide for others; and this little Blanche was very near her heart. Who could help loving her? a soft, little wilful creature, sometimes cross, sometimes spiteful, with sudden spirits flaming up, and silent deep suppressions, all following one another so rapidly that it was hard to say which of all these sunshines and tempests was Blanche herself.

Then Mathilde took some crumbs from the table and scattered them over the garden path that crossed the window. A sparrow immediately appeared ready to grapple with an enormous block of bread.

'Are you fond of birds?' said Blanche; 'I am,' watching Hugh as he went on with his breakfast. 'There

are thrushes in the garden of the convent where I was brought up, and a nightingale sings in June. I used to watch him under the tree. His song is so pretty; one night we tried to steal out to listen to it, but the good mother punished us all.'

'How glad you must be to be at home again!' said Hugh, who had finished his coffee. 'Now you will be able to listen to nightingales as long as you like.'

Blanche did not answer, she crimsoned up and then became very pale; even her pretty red lips seemed to turn white for a moment. 'Don't you know,' she began, then faltered. She was always gentle, and generally deliberate in her movements, but on this occasion some sudden impulse made her start from her chair, spring swiftly to the window and out into the garden; the birds in front of the window flew away frightened.

Mathilde started; Blanche had vanished. Hugh Gourlay was a little puzzled; he looked at his companion, wondering what he had said amiss. The diligent little woman was still clearing away the breakfast, and brushing the crumbs off the oilskin cover of the table. She seemed to avoid his glance. When Hugh got up and walked into the garden, he saw Blanche sitting in the sunshine as quietly and motionless as if nothing had happened.

Benches alternated with orange trees along the terrace, and Blanche had chosen the sunniest. She sat quite still with her hands linked into her sleeves, in the way she had

learnt from the nuns. She was looking intently at the swaying branch of a tree, from which some lilac dropping westerias were hanging. Her shadow never stirred upon the gravel walk. Beyond the terrace, in the great meadow, the cows were standing in their sombre coats; beyond the cows, the old iron gates were closed against the world—'jaunting by the highway.' It all looked secure and peaceful enough. As Hugh came up, the young Chatelaine moved ever so little and made a place for him on the bench beside her.

'Tell me,' she said, suddenly, 'why did you come here?'

'I came on business,' said Hugh.

'What business?' said Blanche, still looking at the westeria branch where a little sparrow was swinging and swaying to a tune in its own brain.

'We are linen and cotton thread spinners,' said Hugh. 'We make this sort of thing,' and he pointed to her handkerchief. 'We make the fine threads which other people weave into stuff. I should like to show you our mills. We employ three hundred hands, and my father superintends it all, and can calculate almost to a thread the amount of work that should be done in a day, and the profits and probable result of all those twirling wheels.'

'How clever he must be,' said Blanche.

'He made his own fortune,' said Hugh. 'He is very proud of his mills and he walks through the place every

day followed by his two dogs. He has sent me here to buy a patent which your aunt has in her keeping. Perhaps you may know something of the matter,' said Hugh, looking doubtfully. 'It is a machine for spinning the finest threads that can be made. He also wants a poodle; I wonder if there are any to be had in this village. It is a particular sort of machine,' Hugh continued, 'of which your father has left a model, as I understand.'

'A machine! A poodle!' said Blanche, looking at him with her wise yet innocent eyes. 'I will get the key of the house where the machines are put away. I think I can help you; and there is a poor woman in the village who has a poodle to dispose of. His name is Bismarck. He is a very big dog: I will have him brought here for you. I cannot think how anyone can like dogs. We cannot endure them in this house. There are none at the convent; that is one good thing.'

'I can't agree with you,' said Hugh; 'I am very fond of dogs.'

Then he began telling her one dog story after another; he spoke of colleys and terriers and sheep dogs, warming to his subject as he went on; he brought a whole new world into his talk—a world of moors and of liberty, of adventure, a world of nature. . . .

Never in the course of her short existence had little Blanche heard anyone speak in such a voice as this or heard such a hymn to natural things. She had heard of miracles, of ecstacies, of preserves and embroidery; she

had heard of pictures, of incense, of self-infliction and devotion; but of winds and life and liberty and labour, free, enduring—she had never heard anyone speak in this way before. She tried to realise Hugh's stories as they followed; listening with averted eyes. 'I don't want to hear any more,' she said suddenly, then softening suddenly she raised her long lashes with a look that made him almost cease to speak, it was so constraining in its veiled appeal. 'Don't tell me any more,' it seemed to say.

'I shall never hear such things again,' she said, in her slow English. 'I shall soon be gone from here, but I shall remember it all.' Then she sighed and moved uneasily, and then folded her hands once more, but he could see her little tender fingers trembling.

'Are you going to a pretty part of the country?' asked young Gourlay, in his most matter-of-fact tones.

Hugh scouted emotion and avoided it as Blanche avoided poodles, and his tone at once froze her confidence.

'It is pretty enough,' she said, dryly, 'but that will make little difference to me. The place I am going to is . . . . '—she stopped—'would not interest you,' she said.

'One can never tell,' said Hugh, 'what will interest another person, any more than one can tell what may be about to happen to oneself.'

'I know very well what is before me,' said Mademoiselle de Latouche very snappishly; and Hugh vaguely smiled and surmised.

'I could tell you every day of all my life to come as long as I live if I chose,' continued the girl, with a quiver in her voice; 'when you go back to your moors, to your dogs, to your free life, I shall be in peace and safe from the world and its temptations.' She raised her wistful, magnetic eyes, as she spoke, with some wild yet startled look in them that Hugh never forgot again.

'What do you mean?' he asked in a different tone.

'I am going to enter the Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Pilgrims,' said little Blanche, in a low voice. Then she said no more, but sat smoothing the fluff upon her tippet, mechanically stroking it down with her little fingers.

The bewildered Englishman remained on the bench beside her—watching her in surprise and painful interest. He began presently to question. Contrary to her wont, she answered all his questions with the greatest readiness and simplicity. Yes, it was of her own free-will she was going in. Her aunt wished it, and so did M. le. Curé and her father wished it, so they said; and what else could she do? Once she had thought of marrying a young man her father had approved, but he died: she had only seen him twice, but she always wore his portrait, and she pointed to the locket on her arm. He was something like—she stopped again and went on to speak of the convent. She loved the sisters; they were kinder than anybody else except poor Mathilde.

'And it is a beautiful life,' said the little thing seriously, 'to pray, to sing in the chapel, to be good and loved by all the saints, and to spend one's life for the good of others, praying for them. Perhaps,' she said, clasping her hands thoughtfully, 'some other girl will profit by my prayers and find happiness—my happiness.'

Hugh was too much shocked and frightened to know what to say at the moment, and before he could make up his mind Mathilde came flying out upon the terrace. Mademoiselle desired to see him, she said; would he please come at once?—she did not like waiting. The Curé de St. Rambert was expected and she was already vexed by his delay.

M. le Curé de St. Rambert took a special interest in the fate of little Blanche. The little thing would probably inherit her aunt's fortune as well as her father's possessions: let them beware of scheming fortune-hunters, ready to devour the poor innocent; let them accept with a good heart the safe protection that the Church extends to those holy women who are filled with noble aspirations, and turn to her for safety and refuge. Blanche had been sent to the convent, by his advice, for her education. She seemed to have a vocation; let them beware how they discouraged it! This was St. Rambert's advice.

The Curé de St. Joyeux had nearly been denied the house in disgrace for having shown so little sympathy when his advice was asked concerning Blanche's future. 'Marry

her, Madame,' he had been churlish enough to say; 'find some good young fellow to make a home for her. Hers does not seem to me a character matured for a cloister life. She has movements, sublime movements of piety and fervour; but that is a mere passing phase in her young soul. Some people are thus constituted, and I do not say that they are by any means the worst. Now, there is M. le Vicaire, if you ask me; he seems eminently cut out for religious life. He is now arranging the details of another procession next Thursday: it will be most striking.'

Mademoiselle de Latouche must have been in a capricious mood that day. Mathilde led Hugh into a sort of ante-room, where she begged him to wait while she went in and announced him. The time seemed a little long, and the young man walked to the window and looked out. It was a window which opened on one of the twisted balconies, and from whence he could see the garden, and the terrace, and the orange trees all mapped out before him; and as he looked he saw that M. le Curé de St. Rambert had come up and sat down on the bench where he had been sitting. Little Blanche was still there, listening with averted face to the Curé, who was speaking with unction and much action of the hands. Then she suddenly jumped up swiftly, started away, and set off running along the orange trees, and the Curé crossed towards the house. Mathilde also came out of an adjoining room, looking somewhat confused.

'Well!' said Hugh.

Mathilde shook her head. Mademoiselle had changed her mind; she could not receive him that morning. It was very odd. He had been two days in the house and had not yet seen his hostess.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCE PREPARES TO TAKE LEAVE.

UNTIL he had heard her story, Blanche had seemed to Hugh just a young lady like any other; now, when he looked out into this flower-garden all abloom, and watched the little thing's play and bright antics, and heard her sweet voice, some other chord was struck, and there seemed a strange meaning to it all. After that first explanation, little Blanche seemed to trouble herself no more about her fate; and yet this future was like a shadow creeping over a summer day, so Hugh thought; like the melancholy reverberation of a voice calling gaily across an empty court. The oftener Blanche's laugh sounded the more sadly this echo seemed to sound. . . .

How quickly people get used to the things that they like! Habits of tranquil intimacy are, perhaps, the most insidious of all. They seem so easy, so harmlessly absorbing, why should they not continue for ever? Great events, wonderful successes, deserving triumphs, those may be for others, but for ourselves we ask but little: the peaceful satisfaction, the person you expect, the hour you

love best returning again and again. One is told of the vanity of human wishes, but people do not surely apply so grand a name to anything so unimportant as the opening of a door, the quiet daily entrance of one person or another. . . .

These two young people were thrown into a strange companionship. Mademoiselle de Latouche for once was really ill, and too much absorbed in her symptoms to trouble herself about what was going on in the house. From what H. had said, she had taken it for granted that Mr. Gourlay was a respectable old manufacturer. Mathilde innocently answered all Mademoiselle's questions. He was quiet, gave no trouble, was out most of the day; this was all the account she gave. He was anxious to go as soon as he had been allowed to see the machine.

But Mademoiselle was suspicious. No, not until she had seen him and made her bargain would she consent to let Hugh see the machine or carry off the model. Mathilde had the key; let her keep it for the present.

Two more days went by so peacefully that there was nothing to dwell upon. Hugh was very happy, and in no hurry to leave the chateau. They used to spend long hours on the terrace, nothing happening except that the cows came crossing the field, or the shadow of the sun-dial travelled across the disc. One night Hugh persuaded Mathilde and Blanche to come down to the beach. They walked down the great avenue, of which the trees looked

so tall in the moonlight. As they reached the gate that led to the road, the two priests were passing along on their way from the church; their buckles gleamed in the moonlight. It was a lovely, vast night; that strange harmony which is not sound, which is not silence, was vibrating everywhere. The moon was slowly winning a silver victory, and conquering realm after realm of sand, and down, and sea; now the church spire itself is won, the marble step in the open door, through which you see the dim lamp burning at the altar rail. There within all is still, mysterious, and voiceless; but without, how the sky flashes—what dimmed glory of starlight seems waiting for a signal to burst into life!

That evening, at the Presbytery, H. was sitting among shadows; the husband and wife were walking slowly along the trellis wall; sometimes a star rose above its leafy line, sometimes a veil seemed to fall gently upon all this mystery. I saw the trio from my window as they passed on their way to the beach.

The sea lay quite still in the moonlight, and only streaked by some long black lines that came rolling in strangely, with a dull monotony of calm and sound. Hugh had once heard an oratorio given in the town-hall at York, and the night brought it back to his mind. He had forgotten the music, but he could remember the impression that it made, the sense of distance, the harmonious concords breaking through the modulation of vaguer notes. Here

was the oratorio again. 'It frightens me,' said Blanche; 'but how beautiful it is!' High overhead rode the pale moon, there was a pervading melody of moonlight falling upon the waves, the cliffs were darkly enclosing us all.

Mathilde stood gazing at the black lines in the sea. 'There will be a storm to-night,' she said.

Blanche turned, with a low, soft sigh. 'Come, there is a boat putting off. How I should like to row out into the moonlight!'

When one is young, impressions come like beautiful tunes, easy to remember, with melody caressing and entrancing. Each year adds meaning upon meaning to every feeling, accompaniment to every loving tune, and presently it is no longer one exquisite air, but a great concerted movement that carries us away; each note seems complicated and enchorded into others. Hugh and Blanche were young, uncomplicated as yet; they had not been together a week, nor indeed had they six weeks' experience between them, for Blanche in her convent had scarcely seen less of the world than Hugh among his throbbing engines.

'I think I could remain looking at the waves for years,' said Blanche. 'Ah! what a pity that the convent windows do not look upon the sea!'

'The convent windows will not show you much worth looking at, I should think,' said Hugh, turning abruptly away.

'That is the reason of it,' said Blanche, stopping short. 'The convent is a friend, and comes to detach us from the things of this world, its vanities, its pleasures, and heartlessness.' She spoke with a cold yet passionate earnestness, and waited for him to answer.

'Do you think there are no troubles in life?' said Hugh, with his hands in his pockets, muttering between his teeth. 'Real troubles with some heart in them, instead of flimsy metaphors and fancy penances inflicted by old women.' Blanche flushed furiously.

'I must never speak to you again, if you talk to me like that,' she said. They had walked up to the boats.

All this time a boat was putting out to sea, and the two fishermen to whom it belonged were struggling with ropes and cords and fish baskets; a boy was leaping in and out, hauling and pushing. The weird moonlight fell upon their faces; a woman with a child in her arms stood silently near, watching their progress.

'We are ready,' said the elder man, coming up to wnere the woman was standing; 'good night, my girl; go home; there is nothing to fear.' He gave her a loud kiss, and leapt into the boat; it shoved off with a dull splash, and went rapidly tossing across the black waves. The woman suddenly burst out crying, and kissed her baby again and again. 'Ah!' she said 'it is with the life of our husbands and our sons that the fine company buys its relish for breakfast.'

Blanche looked on; she did not speak, but Hugh saw her eyes following the fisherman's wife as she walked away into the shadow, heavily plodding the shingle. 'Are those real troubles?' said Blanche. 'I am glad I have none of them.' All the way back she was in a shrill and flighty mood. 'Come, Mathilde, make haste,' she said. 'Here is M. le Curé; let us get out of his way. You must go and see that old woman, and tell me if she is consoled to-morrow.'

M. le Curé, however, caught them up in the moonlight as he hurried on his way back to St. Rambert. He came up and joined them, and took off his broad-brimmed hat when Mathilde introduced him to Hugh.

'Does Monsieur remain long in our country?' asked the Curé. 'I did myself the honour of calling upon him at the chateau yesterday, and was disappointed to miss the opportunity.' . . The Curé went on talking very glibly and agreeably, and did not leave them till they reached the gates of the chateau. Then he walked on with gleaming shoe-buckles.

'Well!' said Blanche. 'Now he will interfere as usual, Mathilde. I know it . . .' and then she turned to Hugh and began asking him a dozen questions, about his home, his religion, his priests. 'Did they come into people's homes, and arrange and arrange until one does not know what to think?' said Blanche.

They found some one expecting them when they reached home.

'It was a present,' Blanche said, laughing. 'A present from Mathilde.'

The present was a big white poodle dog, nicely curled and frilled, with a string tied to its muzzle. It had pink eyes, and an innocent black nose like a button. Its wide-spread paws were ornamented with elegant little tufts; its tail ended in a tassel. The old peasant woman who had brought it was gazing wistfully at the foolish blinking eyes that returned her glances with so much truthful affection.

'Was this for me?' cried Hugh, gratefully.

'I cannot tell you dog stories,' said Blanche, saucily, 'but I should like you to. . .'

Blanche stopped. She scarcely knew what she wanted to say, nor did Hugh know what he wished her to say, but her sprightliness changed into a burst of sudden tears; some of them fell upon Bismarck's curly pate, some of them sent Hugh into a curious state of mind. He said good night quickly, and went away along the passage to his own room. All that night he seemed to see Blanche's tears through his broken dreams—crying, was she?—could he help her?—no, how could he help her? For his own peace of mind he had best not attempt it, he had best go and leave her, little thing, to cry, and to rules and penances, if such was indeed her fate.

A sort of picture came before him of Blanche among the metallic elegancies of his Yorkshire home—for an

instant he seemed to see her standing somewhere underneath the verandah by the iron railing that divided off the garden from Ben's enclosed croquet lawn; it was an impossible combination, and the sooner he ceased to dwell upon such things the better for him and—for her? Hugh wished she hadn't cried; wondered how she would look in the morning. Bismarck gave a grunt, and his new master quieted him with a pat, wondering what she would say when they met; and also when his hostess would make up her mind to receive him. He had been four days in the chateau, and as yet she had given no sign, except indeed by sending him several sets of *compliments*, that Mathilde had duly delivered.

The poodle slept in a corner of Hugh's bedroom all that night; about two o'clock in the morning, to the consternation of the household, he roused the whole place with his howls. Hugh quieted him as best he could, but the consequences were serious. Mademoiselle had been awakened; her indignation was not to be described.

When Hugh came down to breakfast he found Mathilde pale, with red eyes, as red as Bismarck's own; Blanche nervous, uneasy, starting at every sound. M. le Curé had been sent for. They had been up all night.

'Oh! sir!' said Mathilde, giving him his coffee with a trembling hand; 'how am I to tell you?'

'I will tell him,' said little Blanche, coming up. 'My aunt says that you must not stay with us any longer, that

you must take Bismarck, and that we are never to meet again,' said the girl in a cold, dull voice.

'Nonsense,' said Hugh. 'Of course I must go if your aunt wishes it. I shall go home with Bismarck. Here is a letter from my father which is also to summon me home: for many reasons it is the best thing I can do. But if you will let me come back,' he said, gravely, seeing her quivering looks.

Blanche's eyes were cast down: she flushed up, said something unintelligible, and ran out of the room, as the priest entered with blandest politeness. Mademoiselle de Latouche's indisposition was so grave, that she regretted being obliged to inform her friend that she should not be in any condition able to transact the business upon which he had come. 'The coach leaves at three, I believe,' said the Curé.

Hugh got up and bowed very stiffly.

'I had already made up my mind to leave the chateau,' said he. 'Perhaps, as you pass the village, you would kindly secure my place.'

'With the greatest pleasure,' said the Abbé.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WHITE CAT REMAINS: THE PRINCE CARRIES OFF THE POODLE TO HIS FATHER'S COURT.

WHILE Hugh was packing up and preparing to travel back to his home, little Blanche was flitting away under the trees towards the meadow; she was pacing restlessly on and on, no longer lingering in the autumnal sunshine, scarcely taking pains to hold up her long white dress as it flowed upon the ground. But the place was so trim and crisply kept that there was but little to soil her skirt. She was not herself somehow, less to-day than she had ever been; its radiance and peaceful completeness seemed a long way from her; some sudden revulsion of feeling had filled her grey eyes with tears; she seemed to belong to the place as she had never belonged to it before, to feel that she had never been conscious enough of all the beautiful things, the memories, the childish hopes which had come to her there. Yes, there in that hollow she had once come with her father, holding his hand, and she could remember him standing in the gateway and calling to her. It was his wish that she was following now. M. le Curé

de St. Rambert had told her so. How could she judge? A poor girl who has known nothing of life, who has seen no one, been nowhere; 'and yet they might have waited,' said little Blanche bitterly to herself. Now Hugh was going, he had left her with scarcely a word; only he had said he would come back. He said so, and surely he meant it. So long as he came in time. 'My aunt is unhappy at parting from me; she is too good to care for mere personal feeling; but it will be terrible for Mathilde when I am gone.' Then she began to think about the convent; she could see it all quite plain, and hear the nuns' voices through the rustling of the trees, and the novices' parlour with its two or three books, the altar to the Virgin, the cupboards, the straw chairs, and the window into the passage.

'Good-bye!' sister Marie Alba had said, the morning she came away, in her melancholy voice; 'have you seen the good mother and taken leave?'

Then three novices had come in, and sister Angelique, with a long flying veil, all saying farewell. 'We shall see you again, my beloved, and then you will stay with us,' the two nuns had said.

Sister Françoise had been putting linen in the cupboard, great heavy sheets with blue lines, the doors were open with the crosses on the corner panels. Françoise had turned her pale nose ('Will mine look like that?'

wondered Blanche): 'Before you go, dear angel, your eyes are so clear, look at my silver ring, tell me whether it is bent. I showed it to sister Catherine, but she cannot see anything amiss, and yet, by holding it to the light, does it not appear somewhat flattened, just by the silver heart?'

Blanche had taken the ring and the chain with its mythical symbols of hearts and flames into her hand. 'What does it signify whether it is bent or not, Sister Françoise?' she asked.

'It matters—it matters a great deal; why the good mother herself—I shall ask M. le Curé next time he comes. Dear child, you are not going away in the convent dress?'

'She has leave to wear it,' said the sister Angelique. 'It is a special grace, for her own clothes are not come from the dress-maker's. . . .'

So it all came back to her, Blanche thought, with a sting of self-reproach: how familiar and kind those worn faces were! Perhaps that was why Mathilde, with her worn looks, seemed more like home to her than her aunt, herself comfortable and handsome in that well-appointed room; and then Blanche thought of a life devoted, of highest impulse on earth leading to glorious reward in Heaven, so they told her, so the Curé had told her just now; but would there not still be time in another year?

she wanted to wait for the fête next month; she wanted leave to keep a dog in the convent; she wanted—what did she want? She thought of the fisherman's wife the night before, of the sea, of the moonlight: everything seemed to hurt, to tear her in every direction; she need not determine yet, not yet—not yet.

Hugh was to start at eleven, and Blanche came hurrying back to the house with the stroke of the stable clock. Hugh came down the steps from the great hall looking for her, and found her waiting with Mathilde by the truck where his luggage was piled, to which Bismarck was tied by a string. M. le Curé was also there, and would have cut matters short. But nothing daunted Hugh took Blanche's little hand, and said farewell rather sadly. Perhaps his farewell was a little formal, the Curé's eye was upon them, only after saying good-bye, and parting, Blanche lost all courage and drooped shyly.

'Good-bye,' said Hugh, suddenly coming back. 'I shall see you again, and meanwhile I know you will persuade your aunt to let me see the model. I will write. I shall trust to you.'

'Yes, trust me,' said Blanche, brightening up and still smiling, as he walked off waving his hand.

The Curé was still on the terrace, but she brushed past him without speaking.

This much Blanche felt that she must do, she must see

Hugh once again, say good-bye to her friend once more, and give him the thing that he wished for: this much was her right. She had not talked to Hugh all those long hours without being somehow carried away from her old boundaries, never to return to them, never again.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCE AT HIS FATHER'S COURT.

PEOPLE say that some things don't change, but surely when a man comes back changed himself, it is no longer the same old familiar life, if the impression it makes is different. Hugh came back, the iron gate creaked, the front door opened as usual with a jerk, the barometer in the hall was in its place, and the wide-awake he had left was still hanging on the hook. He looked into the dining-room, a huge cheese stood on the sideboard; then he opened the drawing-room door, and thought it looked even more vulgar and ugly than he had imagined. They used to be proud of the drawing-room, it had been carefully furnished by Ben with upholsterers' flights of fancy—cupidons and 'drawing-room suites' of rosebuds. The furniture was bursting with green satin and gilt buttons and tassels of extra length. A banner screen of beads, sewn together to represent an angel, floated before the hearth, spikes and scrolls were freely scattered about the room, upon chair-backs, fenders, door handles; ornate designs combining flourish with many unexpected results

Hugh thought of the stately old furniture at the chateau, of its subdued decorum and dignity. He came back longing to set his house on fire, and to throw Ben and his hideous treasures out of window. One of the windows was suddenly darkened by a thick pillar of smoke shooting from behind the delicate ash tree.

'So you have brought back a French poodle,' said Ben, meeting his brother with a hearty sort of laugh. 'Bat heard of one the other day in Preston, and brought it up, but the governor won't have it and says it's a cur. He wouldn't even look at the poor beast, and I had to send it back. Well, have you heard? Cogmore's burst up and the mills are in the market. Bathurst insisted on sending for you. He ought to be in by this.'

Then the door opened, and Mr. Gourlay came in from the counting-house to lunch off the great cheese on the sideboard, and to clap Hugh on the shoulder with a grim salutation.

'Here you are. You got my letter. Hollo! you have brought me a poodle,' said the old cotton-spinner. 'Well, has Ben told you the news? Cogmore has failed. The mills are for sale, and I am for buying them up. Neither Ben nor Bathurst would agree to make the bid without you . . . and so we thought it was better to send at once. If we get the place it'll be an opening for one of you lads. The first that brings home a wife can go there and settle down.' Then in about five minutes more Mr. Gourlay had

disposed of his business and his bread and cheese, and was trudging back to the mills briskly calculating the chances of all these whirring lines, that seemed to spin straight from the gill to the pockets into which he had thrust his hands.

Hugh was very much excited by the venture; he was pleased to be consulted by his brothers. It was a scheme which promised a new opening to his energies. Perhaps, if all went well, he might find himself installed there one day, and then came a vision of little Blanche standing on the iron bridge that crossed the stream in front of the Cogmore factories; perhaps, the sun was setting, the day's work was ending. Then Hugh told himself this was folly; that he had his business to do, and his duty to carry out. He was not going to shirk it. His old vague discontent was gone, his path lay plain before him now. Perhaps, as others before him, Hugh may have been thinking more of himself and of his duty, his own well-being and doing, just then, than of any other person's.

And so more time went by in calculations, future threads, and payments, and bills to meet the payments; the Gourlay threads rolled out north, east and west, wound themselves into distant countries, were bleached in tropical suns, steeped in Ganges water, and the payments flowed steadily in to the Gilwick Bank. A little incident happened in the bank one day, trifling enough, but which disturbed my hero greatly. One day when he and Bismarck

had walked in together to cash a cheque, a man and a woman were standing in the outer office. The woman was crying. 'Good-bye, my lass,' said the man; 'doant wait any longer. Don't ye greet. Did ye think I should forget ye?' The clerk handed over the money and some silver that gleamed, and Hugh looked at the date of the cheque, and somehow at that moment a ghost of moon light came into the busy bank. He seemed to stand by the sea-shore once again, and to hear Blanche's childish voice asking if this was sorrow, real sorrow. . . . Bismarck gave a little frisk seeing his master turn as if to leave the place, but although he turned Hugh stood quite still. Three weeks had passed since he had left Normandy. What was happening at the Presbytery, at the chateau? It all flashed before him. Was Mademoiselle recovered from her indisposition? Was little Blanche still safe in the chateau? Her sleeping image had suddenly awakened, and followed him home, a frightened and plaintive little ghost, calling to him not to desert her.

The mills never went up to auction, but were handed over by private contract signed by the unfortunate Mr. Cogmore and the prosperous and highly respectable Mr. Gourlay, who walked into the solicitor's office with his three sons one fine morning, and came out the possessor of Gilwick Manor and of the lease of the Cogmore valley. 'We shall want new machinery,' said the old man, as they

waited in the office. 'Hugh, speak up, and tell us about the Frenchman's patent.'

But Hugh had nothing whatever to say concerning the matter. He had been summoned away before he had been able to conclude any business. Bat mentioned the invention of a friend of his in Manchester. Ben had also a scheme to recommend. Hugh said he was quite ready to go back to Normandy, that as far as he could remember there was nothing that could come near the French patent.

The patent was it, or the image which had been asleep all these weeks? That very afternoon Hugh told his father it was necessary for him to return to Normandy—not only to bid for a patent, but to try and win a bride. His doubts were over, he forgot that they had ever existed, as he landed once more on the noisy and chattering shores.

Blanche had sent a message to our children to come up and walk in the garden of the chateau whenever they liked; they were English—that was enough to make them her friends. Did she not love all English people, and long for an English letter? She waited for a letter every day, but no letter came, or sign of Hugh Gourlay.

One day Bismarck's former owner, who had been hovering about the terrace for some time, came up to Blanche as she passed on her way from mass. Had she heard from the gentleman who had bought the dog? had he ever sent

news of poor Bibi? He had been seen at the diligence office that morning. Denise sharply told the woman to make way.

It was that afternoon, I believe, that the whole company straggled up along the dusty road, Albinia flitting ahead with her Binnie clinging to her skirts. The Major carried the little one, and Marjory and Anne proudly bore their provisions in their little baskets; the homeliest fare, short bread and rolls, and milk in a stone jug. They found a tea-table, an old leaf-besprinkled bench among crisp autumnal avenues; they made a centre-piece of daisies in a saucer. A few brown leaves dropped into their cups, but they rendered them all the more intoxicating. Children love open air, they love play, and they love their elders to look on at their gambols. As we all sat round, resting after our hot toil, we saw a figure advancing along the avenue; it came out of an old shed which had been built against the wall not far from where we were sitting.

'Who is it?' said H. 'Is it a nun?'

CHAPTER X.

THE PRINCE CUTS OFF THE WHITE CAT'S HEAD AND THROWS IT INTO THE FIRE.

THE pupils in the convents of the sisters of the order of the Holy Pilgrims wear a very singular and unbecoming dress; it is made of grey merino, plainly cut, with loose long sleeves falling upon their hands. Their young faces are enclosed in white caps with narrow frills, to which are attached black floating veils, which give them somewhat the appearance of nuns themselves. This dress is not becoming, but there are those for whom the quaint sobriety only serves as a foil. Blanche de Latouche was certainly one of these. Neither caps, nor veils, nor prim grey robes could shade her sudden beauty; the soft eyes pierced through quills of any depth, and veils far thicker than the gauze that was floating along the garden pathway. The veiled apparition was not a nun—it was Blanche, in her convent school-girl dress. Some feeling had made her put it on to-day. This was the day that she was to have made her profession, and she had somehow made up her mind that this was the day Hugh would

come. All day long she had been expecting him; all day long she had been making up her mind quietly, with gentle perversity, that she would help him to get what he wanted; that her farewell gift to him should be that model, upon which he had set his heart. It was hers—her father had left it her: this much she knew, she had a right to her own as yet. It was for that she had taken the key from the shelf where it lay in Mathilde's cupboard neatly docketed with the others. She had come down to assure herself that all was right—the model safe in the outhouse, the lock turning on its hinges. She feared she knew not what. She half expected the Archbishop, armed with all the thunders of the Church, to appear, and carry it off under his arm. Suddenly she saw our little conclave looking on with wide open eyes. She had never spoken to us before, but as she came forward gently towards us —skirting the path as a child might have done—Albinia went to meet her.

'I am glad to welcome you,' Blanche said prettily in English. 'I am glad M. Gourlay gave you our message. Any time my aunt will be glad to see you at the chateau. Can we send you anything from the house? Will not the children like to play upon the terrace?—there is a fine prospect.'

She said it all so kindly, and with such cordial grace, that we could not refuse; and so it happened that when Hugh Gourlay came walking up from the inn to the

chateau, after his three weeks' absence, he found us all comfortably installed in the meadow in front of the house. The children were playing puss in the corner—Marjory, Anne, Dodo, and Binnie—at their four corners of the world. Blanche stood in the centre, gleeful, clapping her hands as she darted from one side to another. The children laughed, and flew with all their hearts in the game, holding hands, capering here and there.

They were all in the midst of their play when Hugh came up. I saw him look very strange, and hurry suddenly across the grass; the children began to shout and to cry out that he must join them.

'Blanche is puss! Blanche is puss! Take care!' cried little Dodo, tumbling across his path. Some spirit seemed to set them all flying and capering across the meadow, and Blanche suddenly darted ahead, in and out, and round from tree to tree, from bush to bush. The light figure flew; the children followed in the hottest, happiest excitement.

Mathilde appeared upon the terrace. I saw that Mademoiselle herself, with one of her priests, was looking out of her tower windows.

As Blanche started off she passed close to Hugh. 'You are come at last,' she said; then we saw Hugh, with a child on his shoulder, set off running too, and the whole party vanished under the nut trees. We could hear their voices ringing on long after they had disappeared.

Hugh once again, say good-bye to her friend once more, and give him the thing that he wished for: this much was her right. She had not talked to Hugh all those long hours without being somehow carried away from her old boundaries, never to return to them, never again.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRINCE AT HIS FATHER'S COURT.

PEOPLE say that some things don't change, but surely when a man comes back changed himself, it is no longer the same old familiar life, if the impression it makes is different. Hugh came back, the iron gate creaked, the front door opened as usual with a jerk, the barometer in the hall was in its place, and the wide-awake he had left was still hanging on the hook. He looked into the dining-room, a huge cheese stood on the sideboard; then he opened the drawing-room door, and thought it looked even more vulgar and ugly than he had imagined. They used to be proud of the drawing-room, it had been carefully furnished by Ben with upholsterers' flights of fancy—cupidons and 'drawing-room suites' of rosebuds. The furniture was bursting with green satin and gilt buttons and tassels of extra length. A banner screen of beads, sewn together to represent an angel, floated before the hearth, spikes and scrolls were freely scattered about the room, upon chair-backs, fenders, door handles; ornate designs combining flourish with many unexpected results

Hugh thought of the stately old furniture at the chateau, of its subdued decorum and dignity. He came back longing to set his house on fire, and to throw Ben and his hideous treasures out of window. One of the windows was suddenly darkened by a thick pillar of smoke shooting from behind the delicate ash tree.

'So you have brought back a French poodle,' said Ben, meeting his brother with a hearty sort of laugh. 'Bat heard of one the other day in Preston, and brought it up, but the governor won't have it and says it's a cur. He wouldn't even look at the poor beast, and I had to send it back. Well, have you heard? Cogmore's burst up and the mills are in the market. Bathurst insisted on sending for you. He ought to be in by this.'

Then the door opened, and Mr. Gourlay came in from the counting-house to lunch off the great cheese on the sideboard, and to clap Hugh on the shoulder with a grim salutation.

'Here you are. You got my letter. Hollo! you have brought me a poodle,' said the old cotton-spinner. 'Well, has Ben told you the news? Cogmore has failed. The mills are for sale, and I am for buying them up. Neither Ben nor Bathurst would agree to make the bid without you . . . and so we thought it was better to send at once. If we get the place it'll be an opening for one of you lads. The first that brings home a wife can go there and settle down.' Then in about five minutes more Mr. Gourlay had

disposed of his business and his bread and cheese, and was trudging back to the mills briskly calculating the chances of all these whirring lines, that seemed to spin straight from the gill to the pockets into which he had thrust his hands.

Hugh was very much excited by the venture; he was pleased to be consulted by his brothers. It was a scheme which promised a new opening to his energies. Perhaps, if all went well, he might find himself installed there one day, and then came a vision of little Blanche standing on the iron bridge that crossed the stream in front of the Cogmore factories; perhaps, the sun was setting, the day's work was ending. Then Hugh told himself this was folly; that he had his business to do, and his duty to carry out. He was not going to shirk it. His old vague discontent was gone, his path lay plain before him now. Perhaps, as others before him, Hugh may have been thinking more of himself and of his duty, his own well-being and doing, just then, than of any other person's.

And so more time went by in calculations, future threads, and payments, and bills to meet the payments; the Gourlay threads rolled out north, east and west, wound themselves into distant countries, were bleached in tropical suns, steeped in Ganges water, and the payments flowed steadily in to the Gilwick Bank. A little incident happened in the bank one day, trifling enough, but which disturbed my hero greatly. One day when he and Bismarck

had walked in together to cash a cheque, a man and a woman were standing in the outer office. The woman was crying. 'Good-bye, my lass,' said the man; 'doant wait any longer. Don't ye greet. Did ye think I should forget ye?' The clerk handed over the money and some silver that gleamed, and Hugh looked at the date of the cheque, and somehow at that moment a ghost of moon light came into the busy bank. He seemed to stand by the sea-shore once again, and to hear Blanche's childish voice asking if this was sorrow, real sorrow. . . . Bismarck gave a little frisk seeing his master turn as if to leave the place, but although he turned Hugh stood quite still. Three weeks had passed since he had left Normandy. What was happening at the Presbytery, at the chateau? It all flashed before him. Was Mademoiselle recovered from her indisposition? Was little Blanche still safe in the chateau? Her sleeping image had suddenly awakened, and followed him home, a frightened and plaintive little ghost, calling to him not to desert her.

The mills never went up to auction, but were handed over by private contract signed by the unfortunate Mr. Cogmore and the prosperous and highly respectable Mr. Gourlay, who walked into the solicitor's office with his three sons one fine morning, and came out the possessor of Gilwick Manor and of the lease of the Cogmore valley. 'We shall want new machinery,' said the old man, as they

waited in the office. 'Hugh, speak up, and tell us about the Frenchman's patent.'

But Hugh had nothing whatever to say concerning the matter. He had been summoned away before he had been able to conclude any business. Bat mentioned the invention of a friend of his in Manchester. Ben had also a scheme to recommend. Hugh said he was quite ready to go back to Normandy, that as far as he could remember there was nothing that could come near the French patent.

The patent was it, or the image which had been asleep all these weeks? That very afternoon Hugh told his father it was necessary for him to return to Normandy—not only to bid for a patent, but to try and win a bride. His doubts were over, he forgot that they had ever existed, as he landed once more on the noisy and chattering shores.

Blanche had sent a message to our children to come up and walk in the garden of the chateau whenever they liked; they were English—that was enough to make them her friends. Did she not love all English people, and long for an English letter? She waited for a letter every day, but no letter came, or sign of Hugh Gourlay.

One day Bismarck's former owner, who had been hovering about the terrace for some time, came up to Blanche as she passed on her way from mass. Had she heard from the gentleman who had bought the dog? had he ever sent

news of poor Bibi? He had been seen at the diligence office that morning. Denise sharply told the woman to make way.

It was that afternoon, I believe, that the whole company straggled up along the dusty road, Albinia flitting ahead with her Binnie clinging to her skirts. The Major carried the little one, and Marjory and Anne proudly bore their provisions in their little baskets; the homeliest fare, short bread and rolls, and milk in a stone jug. They found a tea-table, an old leaf-besprinkled bench among crisp autumnal avenues; they made a centre-piece of daisies in a saucer. A few brown leaves dropped into their cups, but they rendered them all the more intoxicating. Children love open air, they love play, and they love their elders to look on at their gambols. As we all sat round, resting after our hot toil, we saw a figure advancing along the avenue; it came out of an old shed which had been built against the wall not far from where we were sitting.

'Who is it?' said H. 'Is it a nun?'

CHAPTER X.

THE PRINCE CUTS OFF THE WHITE CAT'S HEAD AND THROWS IT INTO THE FIRE.

THE pupils in the convents of the sisters of the order of the Holy Pilgrims wear a very singular and unbecoming dress; it is made of grey merino, plainly cut, with loose long sleeves falling upon their hands. Their young faces are enclosed in white caps with narrow frills, to which are attached black floating veils, which give them somewhat the appearance of nuns themselves. This dress is not becoming, but there are those for whom the quaint sobriety only serves as a foil. Blanche de Latouche was certainly one of these. Neither caps, nor veils, nor prim grey robes could shade her sudden beauty; the soft eyes pierced through quills of any depth, and veils far thicker than the gauze that was floating along the garden pathway. The veiled apparition was not a nun—it was Blanche, in her convent school-girl dress. Some feeling had made her put it on to-day. This was the day that she was to have made her profession, and she had somehow made up her mind that this was the day Hugh would

come. All day long she had been expecting him; all day long she had been making up her mind quietly, with gentle perversity, that she would help him to get what he wanted; that her farewell gift to him should be that model, upon which he had set his heart. It was hers—her father had left it her: this much she knew, she had a right to her own as yet. It was for that she had taken the key from the shelf where it lay in Mathilde's cupboard neatly docketed with the others. She had come down to assure herself that all was right—the model safe in the outhouse, the lock turning on its hinges. She feared she knew not what. She half expected the Archbishop, armed with all the thunders of the Church, to appear, and carry it off under his arm. Suddenly she saw our little conclave looking on with wide open eyes. She had never spoken to us before, but as she came forward gently towards us —skirting the path as a child might have done—Albinia went to meet her.

'I am glad to welcome you,' Blanche said prettily in English. 'I am glad M. Gourlay gave you our message. Any time my aunt will be glad to see you at the chateau. Can we send you anything from the house? Will not the children like to play upon the terrace?—there is a fine prospect.'

She said it all so kindly, and with such cordial grace, that we could not refuse; and so it happened that when Hugh Gourlay came walking up from the inn to the

chateau, after his three weeks' absence, he found us all comfortably installed in the meadow in front of the house. The children were playing puss in the corner—Marjory, Anne, Dodo, and Binnie—at their four corners of the world. Blanche stood in the centre, gleeful, clapping her hands as she darted from one side to another. The children laughed, and flew with all their hearts in the game, holding hands, capering here and there.

They were all in the midst of their play when Hugh came up. I saw him look very strange, and hurry suddenly across the grass; the children began to shout and to cry out that he must join them.

'Blanche is puss! Blanche is puss! Take care!' cried little Dodo, tumbling across his path. Some spirit seemed to set them all flying and capering across the meadow, and Blanche suddenly darted ahead, in and out, and round from tree to tree, from bush to bush. The light figure flew; the children followed in the hottest, happiest excitement.

Mathilde appeared upon the terrace. I saw that Mademoiselle herself, with one of her priests, was looking out of her tower windows.

As Blanche started off she passed close to Hugh. 'You are come at last,' she said; then we saw Hugh, with a child on his shoulder, set off running too, and the whole party vanished under the nut trees. We could hear their voices ringing on long after they had disappeared.

Blanche led the way by the covered path towards the shed; there she suddenly stopped short, and all the children surrounded her, calling out that she was caught.

She turned to Hugh, panting and blushing, and breathless; 'I knew you would come. Here,' she said, 'take this key—it is the key of this shed, where the model is kept; I want you to have it. It is a farewell gift from a friend—a true friend. You can bring two men to-night and carry the machine away. It is mine; I may still give it to you.'

'Still give it!' said Hugh, very pale. 'What does this mean? What is this veil? Blanche' . . . . he could scarcely speak the words, as he pointed.

'It is only my old school dress,' said Blanche, smiling, and still breathless. She was touched by the expression of his face.

'I am not yet a nun,' she continued sadly, 'I have asked for delay. The Curé of Joyeux helped me. My aunt's director is very angry, but that I cannot help.'

'Run, run,' cried little Marjory, who thought it was very stupid to stand still and talk.

Once more Blanche would have started off shyly. 'Ah; I am caught!' she cried. A straggling thorny rose hung over the roof of the shed; her long flying veil had got twisted in the branch. She was a prisoner, for her veil was securely fastened to her cap and to her thick coils of hair.

Hugh tried in vain to disentangle it. I believe his hands were still tremulous.

'If Mathilde were here, she could untie the string,' said Blanche, struggling nervously.

'Make haste! make haste! Here is the Curé running after us,' cried the children excitedly.

'O! if I had but a knife,' cried Blanche, impatiently; 'I might cut the string.'

Hugh pulled out his big knife, and in an instant had snipped the cap-string, and with the string the veil gave way, and Blanche, springing free once more, shook all her beautiful sunshine of hair in a glistening mist over her shoulders; then she turned, laughing and blushing, to thank him. The cap lay on the ground in the sunshine.

'Mademoiselle Bla-an-an-anche;' sang Mathilde in the distance, calling, 'your aunt wants you.'

'Oh, she is a fairy princess,' sang Binnie, dancing about madly, and clapping his hands.

The two looked at each other. They had forgotten the children's presence. 'O, think well of it!' he was saying. 'Leave all this behind. Leave the convent, it is not made for you. Come with me—come home to your home in England. I will take care of you.' He spoke in a voice that seemed to carry Blanche away by its reality—by its natural might of tender protection. 'Do you hear me? You frightened me dreadfully,' said Hugh who was still quite pale. 'Speak, Blanche. Give me your hand.'

As if in a dream, she put her hand in his. The children had begun a new song and set off dancing along the avenue; the two, still hand-in-hand, walked on, following unconsciously. Little Marjory dropped all the daisies out of her nosegay in their path as she ran; little Dodo picked up a pretty golden leaf and threw it at Blanche's white skirt. They all turned down a side alley. The Curé de St. Rambert, coming up to the place where they had been standing, only found the cap lying in the sunshine, and the long veil still floating from a branch. . . .

In those days marriages between Catholics and Protestants were not so strictly forbidden as now. Hugh had a battle to fight, but we all know what happened when the prince drew his sword and cut off the white cat's head.

My hero won his bride. Blanche married him as soon as she came of age. Old Mr. Gourlay was enchanted. Ben and Bathurst both married also, soon after Hugh.

Blanche is very happy at Gilwick. She is far the sweetest of the three brides. She is a great favourite with her father-in-law, and since her coming Bismarck has ceased to regret Normandy.

Mademoiselle still reigns at the chateau, still purveys for her body in the present, her soul in the future; still insists upon practising every virtue herself at the expense of any inconvenience to everybody else. It is very hard, but not the less true, that if you are absorbed

in wishing to do right yourself and to be unselfish, you can't always be thinking of others who may also like to do right and to avoid being selfish. People miss, ah! what opportunity, what kindness, what wealth of good-will, because their hearts are lazy, because they close them to one another instead of opening and responding quick, quickly at the moment to the moment's touch. It is want of love that makes us fail, not want of will to do right.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

MISS THACKERAY'S WORKS.

New and Uniform Edition, Monthly Volumes, each Illustrated with a Vignette Title-page, drawn by Arthur Hughes and engraved by J. Cooper, large crown 8vo. 6s.

VOLUMES NOW READY, PRICE SIX SHILLINGS EACH.

THE VILLAGE ON THE CLIFF.

Crown 8vo. 6*s*.

'Compared with the ordinary run of three-volume novels, the brief history now before us is a highly finished cabinet picture by the side of a dozen square yards of stage scenery.... We may venture to congratulate the authoress on having inherited some of the most precious literary excellences of her distinguished father.....But, besides this, the writer possesses original gifts of her own, a capability of minutely analysing mental struggles, and a peculiar faculty for depicting the landscape in which her characters move. So powerful is her rendering, that we do not merely say coldly, "This is a vivid and truthful picture;" we insensibly breathe, as we read, the very atmosphere of the place described.' THE TIMES.

OLD KENSINGTON.

Crown 8vo. 6*s*.

'In laying her scenes in Old Kensington, the author has shown an artist's instinct, and chosen her ground where she was likely to write at her strongest.....It is an illustrated idyl from first to last.' THE TIMES.

'One of the most perfect pieces of poetic fiction that the present age has produced..... The characters have in them the mystery and the awfulness of life. They are not merely figures contrived for the sake of the narrative; they are souls trembling to the touch of many emotions—full of desires, hopes, weaknesses, joys, sorrows, affinities, like the souls of living men and women.' THE DAILY NEWS.

'.....Interspersed among these graceful pictures will be found an abundance of thoughtful, terse moralisings about men and things; little touches of kindly satire and half-humorous pathos in dealing with the lights and shadows, the sins, follies, and weaknesses of modern life, which help to season many a page, and carry the reader pleasantly on to the close of the tale, which dies faintly out at last, like a strain of music.' THE STANDARD.

'This story is worthy of consideration in two aspects; first, on account of its intrinsic merits; secondly, as a timely protest against the falsehood in art which is so prevalent among novel writers of the present period.....Altogether, we are inclined to rank "Old Kensington" as the second novel of the season. It is the only work worthy to be placed after the *chef-d'œuvre* of George Eliot—"Middlemarch."' THE EDINBURGH REVIEW.

'High as we were inclined to rate Miss Thackeray's gifts, we were certainly quite unprepared for such a novel as "Old Kensington."..... Miss Thackeray has, by this work, placed herself in the very foremost ranks of English novelists.' WESTMINSTER REVIEW.

London, SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.

FIVE OLD FRIENDS AND A YOUNG PRINCE.

Crown 8vo. 6*s*.

'Miss Thackeray can cast that atmosphere of wonder and delight which children find in the spells and transformations of their fairy tales round events of real life, and make us feel that rationalism is not, after all, the presiding genius of modern society.' THE SPECTATOR.

'A pleasing, popular volume, which the young will accept with pleasure, and in which the old will recall the days when "Beauty and the Beast," and "The Sleeping Beauty of the Wood" were realities.' JOHN BULL.

'As charming a book as we have read for many a day, one which cannot fail to delight readers of every bodily and mental age, as well those who can appreciate its high artistic merit as those who will enjoy, without criticising, its unforced humour and genuine pathos.' THE SATURDAY REVIEW.

TO ESTHER, AND OTHER SKETCHES.

Crown 8vo. 6*s*.

'Miss Thackeray may call her tales "sketches," but they commend themselves to us as pictures, and as pictures very beautifully painted. It is hard to pick and choose where each story is diversely good.....The author has caught so truly every colour and every accent that she goes amongst these villagers herself, and we follow her without constraining in the least their everyday existence. She takes up and lays down the story of a group of men and women without effort, without forcing them out of their natural grooves. No doubt this is high praise, but our readers have only to turn to the story we refer to and they will see that it is deserved.' THE TIMES.

'Miss Thackeray's stories are studies of character.....The singular delicacy of touch and absorbed feeling which lent its great charm to the author's almost unique "Story of Elizabeth," are displayed in unabated measure.' DAILY TELEGRAPH.

'The stories in this volume are exquisite gems, and will, if possible, add to Miss Thackeray's name as one of our most charming and refined writers.' OBSERVER.

'A volume of charming and graceful sketches, marked by all Miss Thackeray's usual tenderness and simplicity, as well as by all her usual picturesque purity of style.....Not a single line can be skipped without positive loss, and every word will be read with pleasure.' STANDARD.

'A truly delightful bouquet of stories.'—GRAPHIC.

'.....We love to linger over the book, to refer to it again and again, to turn its pages lightly, resting on some special passage, or to read it often almost from end to end.' JOHN BULL.

London, SMITH, ELDER & CO., 15 Waterloo Place.